

A WEEK IN THE FALL OF JERUSALEM



BEN WITHERINGTON III

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IVP Academic

An imprint of InterVarsity Press
Downers Grove, Illinois

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WHERE THERE'S SMOKE



JOANNA AWOKE SUDDENLY to the sound of a *shofar* blowing, its long, piercing call cleaving the cool morning air. It was barely cockcrow. The sun had not yet penetrated the cracks of the windowless house. Rousing herself, she sat up on her improvised couch. The acrid smell of smoke snapped her out of drowsiness. It was not the smell of wood or sacrifice—perhaps tar or pitch?

Shofar

A shofar is a trumpet-like instrument made by hollowing out a horn, usually a ram's horn. The horns vary in shape and size depending on the age and size of the animal from which they were taken. Typically used at Jewish festivals such as Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) or Passover, it can also be used in synagogue services. This horn is first mentioned in the Bible in connection with God's appearance at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:16). A shofar could also be used to signal the beginning of a battle (Josh 6:4; Judg 3:27; 7:16; 1 Sam 8:3). The sound of the shofar was distinguishable from the trumpet, and this is significant in our story, as the Romans used trumpets, not shofars, to give military signals.

Fear rose in her chest in a familiar way, and brought back a time in her life when it had been her constant companion. Joanna had returned to Jerusalem from Roma after her husband, Andronicus, had been martyred during Nero's crackdown four years earlier. Andronicus had been swept up by the same Roman net that had caught the Jesus followers Peter and then Paul. None of them emerged alive from their

time in the wretched prison called *Tullianum*. Andronicus had been crucified near the Appian Way. Joanna still shuddered whenever that memory came to mind. So the recent crisis in Jerusalem triggered memories of past traumas, mingled with tears.

Joanna had come to Jerusalem a couple of months ago to care for her ailing sister, Sarah. It had been a bold venture on her part, since the city was surrounded by Titus's army. But her plan of circling around the city and entering from the southwest, near the city of David, had succeeded. Under the cover of darkness, Joanna had managed to sneak into the city at a point where the Roman troops were less concentrated. Her sister, who suffered in her breathing, had eventually been confined to her bed despite weeks of Joanna's best efforts. Only three days ago, on the day before the Sabbath, she had been gathered to her ancestors and interred in a makeshift grave in the southern part of the city, in the Hinnom Valley. In the midst of her grief, Joanna had wrestled with what she should do next. Now, awakened by the shofar, a new urgency possessed her.

Tullianum

The Tullianum, known in the Middle Ages as the Mamertine Prison, was a cave carved out of solid rock on the northeast slope of the Capitoline Hill in Rome. It was reserved for criminals accused of heinous crimes before their trial or execution. While prisoners were traditionally held at the Campus Martius, the military headquarters on the edge of Rome, it seems that if a special prisoner was going to be publicly executed after a trial before the emperor, they might be held in a special holding cell like the Tullianum. For the Romans, imprisonment was not a punishment. It was a holding pattern until the prisoner was exonerated, penalized, or executed.

Panic gripped her throat, but she mastered it and began to take mental stock. There had been a short-lived hope when Vespasian had withdrawn from Jerusalem and returned to Rome that the Romans might just leave. But recently Titus, Vespasian's son, had brought more troops, and now the siege of the city was well and truly under

way. Food was scarce, and many had been feeling desperate, trapped within the holy city. The Zealots and their henchmen had taken control of most everything going on within, except for a few of the temple functions.

But why was the shofar blowing at this hour, and so insistently? Surely it was some kind of warning. Dread filled Joanna's mind. It was all of a piece with the dread she had experienced almost a generation ago, when her Master had been executed by Roman crucifixion outside this very city.

Suddenly there were cries in the street, a scrambling of sandaled feet, the grinding roll of cart wheels on cobbled pavement along with shouts of "Fire! Fire!" Joanna instinctively grabbed some essentials—unleavened bread, dates, figs, olives, a small flask of wine—and thrust them in her traveling satchel. Slipping on her best cloak, she stepped out into the darkness and was nearly overrun by a little ox cart rumbling toward the Sheep Gate.

"What's happening?" she shouted to a young man running alongside the cart.

"The Romans have breached the wall on the far side of the temple! They've set fires and poured pitch over the wall from their siege tower—right on the Zealots. You must flee!"

But where could she run? As she drew near the Sheep Gate, she could see the flickering lantern lights of Roman soldiers coming up the hill to the gate itself. Quickly she doubled back. Now she could see flames illuminating the far side of the city. She tightened in fear, breath shortened, hands clenched, flushed with perspiration. The shofar continued its piercing wail. She could hear the sounds of fighting, the screams of wounded men. This was no place for an old woman like herself. For a moment she thought of going to the house of John Mark's mother. But no, they had packed up and left the city days ago. Her mouth was dry and she wished for a drink as she stumbled on.

The Jewish Revolt

The Jewish Wars, as they were called by the Jewish historian Josephus, began long before the temple fell in AD 70. The wars

involved a general revolt in Judea and Galilee, led by Zealots, a Jewish sect, and their henchmen (called *sicarii*, or “dagger men”). Emperor Vespasian had no idea at the outset that it would take his army years to put down the revolt in this tiny corner of his empire—Judea, Galilee, and Samaria and their environs were no more than about 120 miles north to south, and sixty miles at the widest point east to west.

Some major Zealot leaders, such as John of Gischala, were from the north. The revolt was not solely about the concentration of power in the temple system in Jerusalem. Jews were as angry with the client king Herod Antipas in the north as they were about Roman procurators in Judea to the south. And despite Josephus’s obvious sympathy toward the Jews, it is hard to believe him when he reports that the majority of the citizens of Jerusalem rejected John and the Zealots when they came to Jerusalem sometime in AD 67–68. The Zealots could hardly have taken over the whole city and the temple hierarchy if they had not had cooperation from many Jews in Jerusalem, including perhaps some Idumeans (Herod’s family was largely Idumean). Josephus wrote for the benefit of his benefactors (the Roman emperor and his entourage) as well as for his own Jewish people, and he presents a view from above, that is, the view of the elite, including the landed elite, and not of the ordinary people. For Josephus, John of Gischala and his Zealots were simply brigands or thugs, and he does not really allow that they had any theological or religious motives for their actions, nor even that they were freedom fighters.

Suddenly an idea came to her. She could use water—for a drink and an escape! She would go to the old water channel.

Hollowed out in the days of King Hezekiah, the channel led from the Gihon Spring toward the city wall. There, if anywhere, she might be able to escape.

It seemed Joanna was not the only one with this idea. As she approached the entranceway to the water channel, in the lower part of the city of David, she could make out shadowy figures entering the tunnel. Some were crying children being hurried into the tunnel by their parents. As she got to the entranceway she remembered—there

Joanna thought back to the day at Megiddo when she had gone down to the spring to get water for her Master and the other disciples. The spring was so far underground that it took over an hour to get down and back again to their camp on the edge of the city. But from Gihon to Siloam, even at a snail's pace, she would reach the pool before long.

Dawn was just lighting the eastern hilltops when she reached the pool. Looking up, she could see soldiers, some on horses, silhouetted on the rim of the Mount of Olives and above the Hinnom Valley. Shaking the water from her sandals, then sitting down briefly to wring out the bottom of her cloak, she concluded that the only way of escape was down the valley to Bethany and Bethpage. This was the path of least resistance, and she must hope that the Romans were too busy attacking the city to bother guarding every byway.

As she reached the far southern end of the Mount of Olives, she cast a brief look back. Flames were licking the temple precincts. Roman ladders leaned against the city walls. there was a breach in the great wall near Mount Zion, with Roman soldiers pouring into the city's wealthiest precinct and soon, it would seem, into the temple itself. Joanna's heart leapt into her throat as she glimpsed white-robed figures—Levites, no doubt—falling from the pinnacle of the temple. She could not bear to watch. She forged ahead.

Joanna's mind flashed back to when she had heard the prophecies of Jesus that within a generation not one stone would be left on another of Herod's temple. It seemed to be all coming true, and right when Jesus had suggested it would. But she could not linger to see more. While she was living in Roma she had heard too many tales about how Romans sacked cities, raped women, and took all they wanted. Could this be God's judgment on his people for so much unfaithfulness over so many years?

Joanna had hardly walked a half mile from the Pool of Siloam when she arrived at Bethany. She was headed to Mary and Martha's house. Had they left yet? If not, she would urge them to come with her. But just before the final turn to their house, she was stopped by a lone Roman soldier.

"Where are you going, old woman?" he demanded in Greek.

Taking a chance, she replied in Latin, "I am leaving the city and heading to a place of refuge. Please, let me pass."

The soldier was clearly surprised that she could speak Latin. “So you know the *lingua Latina*. Are you from Roma like me?”

“I used to live in Roma,” said Joanna, chafing at the man’s harsh grip on her right arm. “You are hurting me! Surely you can see I am an old woman and no trouble for you. Please let a fellow resident of Roma pass.”

The man smiled for a moment, seemingly amused to hear his native tongue from this unlikely source in this remote province of Judea. Then, with a shrug, he let loose her arm and warned, “Very well, but my legion will place a curfew on the region as soon as the city is taken. I suggest you get off the road as quickly as possible.”

“I will!” she said with relief, and hurried away. Arriving moments later at the door of Mary and Martha’s house, she knocked three times. It was the signal the disciples used. Nothing happened at first. She waited one minute, two minutes, three minutes . . . and then the door opened just a crack.

“Who is there?” whispered a tired old voice.

“It’s me, Joanna.”

Swinging the door wide open, Martha grabbed Joanna’s wrist and pulled her into the darkness of the house.

Hezekiah’s Tunnel

Hezekiah’s Tunnel, a water channel carved out of solid limestone, was a remarkable feat of excavation. Some scholars have recently disputed whether this tunnel should be attributed to the reign and activity of Hezekiah, though it is still a reasonable hypothesis and is supported by 2 Kings 20:20. The famous Siloam inscription, discovered near the tunnel and now in the Istanbul Museum, tells of two teams working at opposite ends of the tunnel (the Gihon Spring on one end and the Pool of Siloam at the other) and meeting in the middle (see figure 1.2).

Whether or not the tunnel was originally carved in the eighth century BC at the instigation of Hezekiah, it certainly existed well before the first century AD and was a strategic feature of the city. The problem for Jerusalem was that its main source of water was outside the city walls; the tunnel gave protected access to the

water in case of siege (for Hezekiah, Sennacherib's siege in the eighth century).

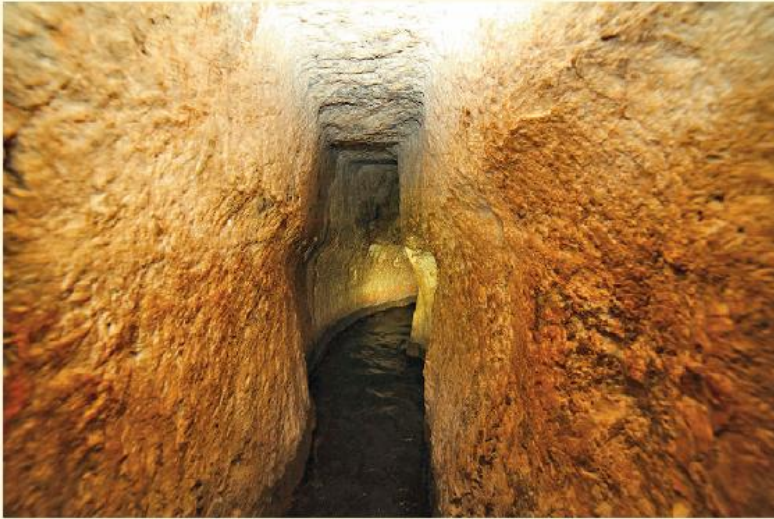


Figure 1.2. Hezekiah's tunnel

The Siege of Jerusalem by Titus: Part Two

By the spring of AD 68, Vespasian had managed to subdue Galilee and move through Judea with a goal of besieging Jerusalem, where the Zealots were now safely ensconced. The Zealots were not a united group: besides John's faction, there was also Simon of Gerasa's faction, and a good deal of infighting.

By AD 69 Vespasian, who had been acclaimed emperor and was returned to Rome, had left his son Titus with the job of subduing Jerusalem. Titus marched with a significant force from Alexandria to Caesarea Maritima, the provincial headquarters. From there he marched with four legions on Jerusalem.

Three legions camped on Mount Scopus, and the fourth legion camped on the Mount of Olives. Thus they came at the city from the northeast and the east, assuming the best high ground overlooking the city. The Zealot factions had by then united—in fact, they sallied forth from the city and repelled the tenth legion, situated on the Mount of Olives, only to be beaten back by Titus's

own troops. By Passover of AD 70, the city had not yet been taken, and Titus built a siege ramp, leveling the ground between Mount Scopus and the city proper.

How might someone like Joanna and many others escape from Jerusalem under siege? Josephus, who was in Titus's entourage and a useful tool in negotiating the surrender of the city, offers a topographical description of the situation:

The city was fortified by three walls, except where it was enclosed by impassable ravines, a single rampart there sufficing. It was built, in portions facing each other, on two hills separated by a central valley in which the tiers of houses ended. . . . The valley of the Cheesemakers [i.e., the Tyropoeon Valley] as the ravine was called . . . divides the hill of the upper city from that of the lower, [and] extends down to Siloam; for so we called that fountain of sweet and abundant water. On the exterior of the two hills on which the city stood were encompassed by deep ravines, and the precipitous cliffs on either side of it rendered the town nowhere accessible.^a (*Jewish Wars* 5.136-139)

It was impossible to plug every exit hole from the city, especially on its south side. And there lay the road to Bethany and beyond, which was Joanna's escape route.^b

^aFlavius Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 5.136-39, in *Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (New York: Robinson, Pratt & Company, 1841).

^bFor much more on all this see Ben Witherington III, *New Testament History: A Narrative Account* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

MIRYAM OF PELLA



THE HEAT OF THE SUN was already radiating from the limestone pavement and the pillars of the agora as Miryam made her early morning trek to the town spring to get water for the day. While the Jordan Valley could be green and pleasant enough in the spring, the region's arid climate reasserted its claim as the seasonal rains receded. It looked to be another searing-hot summer day in the small Greek city of Pella.

Pella

Pella was situated about two miles east of the Jordan River, at the base of the foothills of the northern Jordan Valley, and about eighteen miles south of the Sea of Galilee. The city was one of the ten Greek cities of the Decapolis. Most of its residents—whether Jewish, Idumean, Nabatean, Syrian, Greek, or Roman—spoke Greek. Indeed, Pella was the Greek name for the city. Of the cities of the Decapolis only Gerasa and Damascus are mentioned in the New Testament, and all but Damascus were founded between the time of the death of Alexander in 323 BC and the appearance of the Romans on the scene in about 63 BC. Since Pella was largely Greco-Roman in character, it may have been regarded as a safe haven when Jerusalem came under Roman attack.



Figure 2.2. Pella



Figure 2.1. Ruins of Pella

And as spring gave way to summer, the Roman presence too had become increasingly evident. Yet despite the crisis spoken of in Jerusalem, life here was relatively peaceful. New arrivals were everywhere evident, moving in to escape the troubles across the river in Judea and Galilee. Four years earlier, Miryam had made her own move to Pella from Galilee.

When the skirmishing had begun in Galilee between the Romans and the Jewish revolutionaries, Miryam had weighed her options. About that same time she and other followers of Jesus had heard of Peter's crucifixion outside Roma. Miryam had seen enough of

crucifixions for one lifetime. As violence began to encroach even on the fishing villages on the northwest shore of the Kinneret Sea, Miryam had decided it was time to leave.

She had never married, so leaving Migdal was not as difficult for her, as an older woman, as it would have been for younger families. In fact, she had returned to her home village of Migdal only after many years in Jerusalem, and that move had been precipitated by the crisis of the execution of Jacob the Just, the head of the Jerusalem community of the followers of Jesus.

On one hand, Miryam was glad that more and more followers of Jesus were showing up in Pella. But on the other hand, it also meant they were increasingly noticed in the city. In light of what was happening to Jewish followers of Jesus in Roma, Jerusalem, and elsewhere, it was best to keep a low profile and mind one's own business, thought Miryam, as she bent toward the spring. After all, she was an old woman now, and few paid attention to her word or witness to her faith. But she remembered the old days quite well.

Miryam

Miryam, or Miriam, is the basis for the Anglicized form of the name Mary. Most or all of the Marys in the New Testament, including the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, were actually named Miryam, after the famous Old Testament prophetess and sister of Moses.

Migdal, her hometown, was a thriving fishing village on the northwest shore of Galilee. In Miryam's lifetime it had become a major center for processing fish and making what the Romans called *garum*, a fish pickle sauce. Growing up, her life had been ordinary and predictable. Everything revolved around fishing and faith in the God of the Hebrews. But Miryam would never forget the first time the man from Nazareth came to her village. She had told the story many times to women at the well in Pella, whenever they were willing to listen.





Figure 2.3. The Sea of Galilee

“On the northwest corner of the Kinneret Sea sits the little village of Migdal (Migdala), my hometown, between Kefer-Nahum (Capernaum) and Bet-saida (Bethsaida). All three are fishing villages, and business was booming at that time of the year. One could always tell when things were going well—more tax collectors would show up to take their cut for Herod. But for the people of my town, there was a new topic of conversation—the beautiful new synagogue in Migdal, complete with a reading table decorated with floral designs and a carved image of a menorah. The people of the village had swelled with pride since the synagogue had been completed earlier that summer.

“High up above the fishing village, in the hills that led up to the cliffs of Arbel, was a cave. There I was, sitting at its mouth, covered in dust from head to toe. Back then, I was not an old woman, but life had not been kind to me. I had no one to talk to. I was an outcast. ‘Unclean,’ they called at me, ‘unclean.’ Who were they to judge me? My hair was a mess, and I had covered myself in dirt to protect from the relentless sun, but also the vermin that crawled around in the cave.

**What’s in a Name?
Tiberias, Kinneret,
Genneseret, or Galilee?**

The body of water we know as the Sea of Galilee had various names in antiquity. During the reign of the Emperor Tiberias and later it was called the Sea of Tiberias, along with the city Tiberias, which Herod built by the lake (Jn 6:1; 21:1). The name Kinneret, however, is probably its most ancient Hebrew name (see Num 34:11; Josh 13:27, with a slightly different spelling), and the word seems to mean the same thing as Galilee—namely, “harp.” Presumably this refers to the bowl-like shape of this lake, or even the whole region of Galilee. The name Genneseret is the Greek form of the name Kinneret, and not surprisingly it is used by Luke (Lk 5:1), who is likely writing to his Greek-speaking patron, Theophilus. It appears there was a plain by the western side of the lake known as Genneseret, from which the lake may have taken its name.

An inland sea some 693 feet below sea level, it is the lowest freshwater lake on earth. The only body of water on earth that is lower is the saltwater lake known as the Dead Sea. Both bodies of water lie in the Jordan Rift Valley, the deepest land depression on earth, as does Jericho, the lowest city on earth.

The lake itself is a mere thirty-three miles in circumference, and even in antiquity it was not a great deal bigger than it is now. It is fed by two water sources—mainly by the Jordan, but also by some freshwater springs. It provides the only major source of freshwater fish in the region and was vital for the food supply of Galilee. Not surprisingly, all the villages on the western shore of this lake were fishing villages.

“My name is Miryam (Mary), named for the prophetess, the sister of Moses. But I was not honored among men like that Miryam was. No, indeed, I had been cast out of the village because they suspected I had unclean spirits. There were also rumors that men had used me for their pleasure, but those were malicious lies. Their attempts were unsuccessful. I look small, I know, but I had a loud, ferocious voice when I wanted to use it, and I defended myself with shrieks and kicks, fighting off those lust-filled men. My parents were dead, and my only brother had left town looking for work elsewhere, leaving me truly alone.

Apostolic Martyrdoms

We do not know exactly when Peter or Paul lost their lives in Rome, but it was likely in the mid to late 60s, after the fire in Rome in AD 64, for which Nero made Christians the scapegoats. It is reasonably clear that Peter and Paul were dead by the time Jerusalem fell to the Romans in August of AD 70. We do know from Josephus that James the brother of Jesus was executed in Jerusalem in AD 62, during a gap between procurators when the high priest was able to take matters into his own hands and do away with the head of the Jerusalem church.

“What had brought me at the young age of twenty-five to live in this cave? It’s a day I will never forget. Seeking help and cleansing from God, I went to enter the new synagogue early on Shabbat. But suddenly, as had happened before, I blacked out, fell down, and began to writhe on the new mosaic floor, foaming from my mouth. Or so they later told me. The president in charge of maintenance of the new synagogue had at once called for several townsmen to drag me out of the holy place. I was not well—unclean, and maybe even possessed by demons.

“I awoke some time later lying just beyond the graveyard, beyond the town’s boundary stone. I was bruised from the fall and bewildered. When I stood up to head back down the hill to where I lived, a tall man with dark hair, the watchman and caretaker of the graveyard, had come and told me—‘You cannot come into the town or the synagogue again. You are possessed, unclean, unwell, cursed by God. We cannot have you here contaminating others in our village, much less contaminating the holy place. Here is your bundle of clothes and things. Take them and go away. Anywhere but Migdal. You are not welcome here ever again!’ And he pushed me up the hill.

“Not knowing what else to do, I wandered up the hill to where the shepherds graze their sheep. I found a little cave, where I sat down, dazed. I eventually managed to ask the shepherds where the spring water was, at least. And I found some abandoned olive and fig trees, which offered a little food. Over time, in exchange for doing some sewing for the itinerant shepherds and goatherds, I was supplied with bread to eat as well. But apart from this sporadic contact with people, I lived alone. The spiders and

the scorpions, the birds and the wild animals, were my only companions. I lived in isolation.

Migdal

From recent excavations in Migdal, we have considerable evidence that this town was a hub of the fish processing industry. *Garum* was the favorite relish of the day, used to flavor a variety of foods. Archeologists have uncovered fish vats at Migdal, in which fish were processed and placed in a seasoned brine for pickling.

There is evidence of perhaps more than one synagogue at Migdal. The discovery at Migdal of a synagogue table with numerous Jewish symbols on its sides, including a menorah and purification vessels, is a sensational find. The synagogue is large, suggesting scholars previously underestimated the Jewish population of Migdal. Jesus may have preached in the synagogue at Migdal.



Figure 2.4. Fish vats in the market of Magdala



Figure 2.5. Synagogue table with carvings of menorah and water jars for ritual purification

“One day a man came over the hill and was heading down the slope to the lake below. He must have seen me sitting alone by the little spring that emerged at the base of the limestone cliffs. I was gulping down the water and washing my hands and face, over and over again. The man stopped for a drink and to fill up his water skin.

“I feared he was another man coming to try to take advantage of me. As he approached the spring I began shrieking at the top of my voice, recoiling in horror as he approached. Suddenly, he heard me say in an inhumanly loud voice, ‘Do not torment me, son of David. Have mercy on me!’

“Jesus would later tell me—I have no memory of it—that my face was contorted out of all recognition, and I was shaking all over. Spittle drooled from my mouth. He concluded I was possessed. The reaction to him was not mine so much as of the one or ones who had taken control of my mind and heart. Holding his right hand out toward me, he said in a stern voice: ‘Leave her! Now! And never return again! In the name of the Almighty, I cast you out!’ I screamed again. I convulsed and rolled on the ground—and then I was quiet, a long silence. Then he said—‘Shalom to you. May God’s wholeness now prevail in your life.’

“This is the story Jesus told me after the fact. I was freed from the spirits. But I remember little.

“At this point I came to my senses. At first I stared into the distance.

Then I began to cry. ‘What is your name, daughter of Abraham?’ asked the man.

“I croaked—‘Miryam, Miryam of Migdal.’

“He sat with me for a few minutes while I caught my breath and recovered myself. Then he said, ‘Come, daughter of Abraham, let us go down to your village below, and I will vouch to the local elder or priest that you are once more in your right mind.’ He handed me his walking stick, as I was still shaking and wobbly. And the two of us went down to the village below.

Early Testimonies About Christians in Pella

Two early church fathers, Eusebius and Epiphanius, comment in several places about Christians fleeing to Pella. Here are two examples:

The people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ migrated from Jerusalem, that, when holy had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judaea, the judgement of God might at last overtake them for all their crimes against the Christ and his Apostles, and all that generation of the wicked be utterly blotted out from among men. (Eusebius, *Church History* 3.5)^a

For when the city was about to be captured and sacked by the Romans, all the disciples were warned beforehand by an angel to remove from the city, doomed as it was to utter destruction. On migrating from it they settled at Pella, the town already indicated, across the Jordan. It is said to belong to the Decapolis. (Epiphanius, *On Weights and Measures* 15)^b

While Eusebius reports from much later (c. AD 325), and

Epiphanius may be largely dependent on Eusebius's earlier report, there is no good reason to doubt the veracity of the tradition that Eusebius relates. The earliest Christian movement included various prophets, such as Agabus, and it is believable that in light of the warnings of Jesus himself about the destruction of Jerusalem within a generation (forty years), later prophetic figures within the Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem would have reiterated Jesus' warnings. In Luke 21:20-21 we read: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out."

^bTranslation adapted from *Epiphanius's Treatise on Weights and Measures: The Syriac Version*, ed. James Elmer Dean (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935). www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/epiphanius_weights_02_intro.htm.

^aEusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 1, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 201.

"That is how I became a follower of Jesus from Nazareth. I followed him all over Galilee, ministering to his needs and those of his other disciples. I followed him all the way to Jerusalem at Passover and even watched as he died on a cruel Roman cross. I followed to the tomb to see where he was laid. A day and a half later, after Shabbat, I returned with other women to dress the body. But the stone had been rolled back, and the body was gone. Then came the greatest shock of my life—he called my name, 'Miryam,' and suddenly he was standing there in the garden alive, well, not a ghost. And he said to me, 'Do not cling to me, but go, tell the brothers.' And I did. They did not believe me until they had seen Jesus himself. But who could blame them after the previous week? We stayed in Jerusalem until we were empowered by God's Spirit, and by that same Spirit we have been witnesses of the Master ever since." ¹

Looking up from the spring now, Miryam saw a group of disheveled travelers approaching the city. "Hello! Where are you coming from?" she called.

A man in the group looked around to see who was asking. "From the holy city, like everyone else. It's in ruins." He ran his hands through his hair, leaving it even more disordered, then glanced at

Miryam, seeming to decide that she was harmless enough. “My name is Jason, and these are members of my family. Is there an inn in this village where we could stay for a while? We escaped with our lives, but we don’t have much else. Even the trees around the city have been cut down by the Romans. The city walls were breached, and they set fire to the temple precincts.”

“I’m glad to be able to assist you in any way I can, Jason. I am Miryam, and I have a tent you can pitch behind my little house up on that hill,” Miryam said, pointing up and to the left. “You are welcome to break bread with me as well. You are Jews?”

“Yes, we are,” said Jason, confirming Miryam’s suspicion despite his Greek name. “This is my wife, Sarai, and my cousin Aaron.”

Miryam observed that the young people were very young indeed, perhaps still in their twenties. They must see her as an innocuous Jewish grandmother, she thought. They still seemed overwhelmed, so she provided further instructions.

“Take a moment to wash and get fresh water for your water skins here, and then come up the hill to my house,” said Miryam. “When you have rested a bit, I would like to hear the whole story of what has been happening in Jerusalem.”

She knew it would be a tale of woe. After all, the Master had warned her and the other disciples that the temple-centered world of the Jews was coming to end. Perhaps not the end of *the* world, but certainly the end of a world, the world of her fellow Jews.

THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM



THE SOUNDS COMING FROM Jerusalem were horrifying. Now, on the second day after the temple precincts had been invaded, Mary, Martha, and Joanna still did not dare leave their windowless house in Bethany. They had no man to offer protection. Eliezer, Mary and Martha's brother, had left Jerusalem for the province of Asia many years ago, along with the mother of Jesus. Only occasionally did Martha receive word of their welfare in the city of Ephesos, where they lived.¹ All their lives the sisters had lived together in the little village of Bethany, never marrying, in part because their father, Simon, had died of leprosy, and their fellow villagers still feared the rest of the family might be plagued by the disease.

Early in the morning, Martha decided to risk a trip to the spring to get water. It wasn't easy. Nearly all the Jewish traffic was heading in the opposite direction. But Martha found her friend Naomi, and together they forged a path to the spring, carrying their water jars on their heads. They reasoned the Romans would ignore two old women, and they were right. The Romans were preoccupied securing the city and plundering the temple precincts.

When they arrived at the Pool of Siloam they found an emaciated, bearded old man, dressed in a faded, tattered gray cloak and seated near the pool. He was eager to talk to anyone who would listen. He claimed to have sat on the Mount of Olives and watched the destruction of the city. As they filled their jars, Martha and Naomi heard his tale.

"While the holy house was on fire, the Romans plundered everything they could. Thousands of those they caught were slain, without respect to their age or honor—children, old men, the rabble, and priests were all killed in the same manner. From where I sat it

looked like the whole city was on fire. You can't imagine anything greater or more terrible than the noise. The shouts of the Roman legions, and the clamor of the rebels and Zealots, surrounded by fire and soldiers. Those in the city joined the outcry of those on the temple mount. Many were already weak from the famine. But when they saw the fire of the holy temple, they broke into groans and cries. And the mountains made the noises echo even louder.

"You couldn't even see the ground for the dead bodies piled on it. Soldiers trampled heaps of bodies, chasing those who tried to escape. The brigands in the temple's inner court fled to the outer court, and then into the city, while citizens fled into the outer court. They say that some of the priests pulled off the lead spikes on the parapet of the temple and hurled them as darts at the Romans." The old man's dark eyes dimmed.

"But they couldn't stop it, and as the fire burst upon them, they retreated to the wall. Two of them—I saw this with my own eyes—threw themselves in the fire rather than turning themselves in to the Romans. It is reported that they were Meirus son of Belgas, and Joseph son of Daleus.² The rumor is that many of the Zealots escaped last night and headed for Herod's fortress, Masada."

Roman Triumphs and the Arch of Titus

On the Arch of Titus near the Forum in Rome there is an image depicting Roman soldiers carrying a menorah from the Jerusalem temple, as well as other booty, as they marched through the streets of Rome in AD 71.

The Roman "triumph" was a formalized victory celebration. First, the Roman senate had to authorize the triumph. Like our modern parades, a Roman triumph would include floats depicting a general's victories, and the general would ride in a chariot in full regalia. His troops would carry the booty through the streets of the city, and last would come the captives in chains, who would be led to the slaughter in the circus maximus, or later in the colosseum. Some Jewish captives would have been thrown to wild beasts; others fought gladiators. In 2 Corinthians 2:13-17 the apostle Paul speaks of himself as a captive in Christ's triumph: "But thanks be

to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life." Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 4:9-11 he writes: "For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings."



Figure 3.1. The Arch of Titus



“Our world really is ending,” said Joanna. Martha nodded, the tears pooling in her eyes.

“The Romans will not stop their retaliation for a long time to come,” said Martha. “It took too much effort, too much time, too many soldiers to sack Jerusalem. They will take their revenge in full measure. After all, Titus nearly lost the battle for the city several times.”

“Yes, he did,” said the old man. “I wonder how many Jews he will drag off to Rome for his victory parade?”

Martha was quiet for several moments. Then she said, “It is like the days when our ancestors were taken off into exile in Babylon. The good news is there is another kingdom coming, God’s kingdom, and no empire will be able to stop it.”

“Ah, but when will it come, and how will we know?” asked the old man.

“When you see a Jew hanging from a Roman cross with a sign reading ‘King of the Jews,’ you will know it’s at hand.” As she spoke Martha lifted the water jar to her head and began the walk back to Bethany.

The old man was quiet for a moment, then called after her —“Didn’t that already happen a generation ago? Where is this so-called king and his kingdom now?”

Martha half-turned and pointed up, saying, “With G-d, blessed be he.”

“But that would mean that God proved him true after that shameful, horrible death on a cross!” exclaimed the man.

“You have said it,” said Martha with a faint smile.

SORROW AND WOE



THREE DAYS AFTER JERUSALEM FELL, the Romans were flushing out pockets of resistance and consolidating their gains. But they also had another task. In the mid-August heat the stench of battle wreckage was already rising from the city, with corpses piled on top of one another. The Roman soldiers knew they would have to bear the brunt of the cleanup. This was not a case of pillage and march back to Roma. Titus and his elite force could do that, but not the legions stationed in the province of Judea.

In the streets soldiers searched door-to-door for entrenched enemy combatants. Others dug trenches for bodies, dumped them in, sprinkled them with lime, and buried them. Lingering fires were extinguished. Jewish informants were questioned and tortured to disclose the whereabouts of John, Simon, and other Zealot leaders. Suspicious areas were cordoned off and searched.

A beggar name Josiah was accustomed to sit at the Damascus Gate, shaking his bowl with a few lepta in it. Few noticed the toothless old man or his cries for money. Josiah was neither blind nor crippled, but his wrinkled, emaciated form and earnest pleading did manage to stir a few hearts to compassion.

Josiah hoped he might be able to salvage something of value now that the fighting had ceased. As he slowly made his way down to the western retaining wall of the temple, the smoke from the fires still burning on the temple mount hung acrid in the morning air. He had heard rumors that some of Titus's soldiers had pried up some of the massive stones to get at the molten gold flowing from the temple treasury—for even the temple treasury, with all its wealth and sacred vessels, had been engulfed in flames.

The Lepta and Ancient Economic Realities

The least valuable of all coins used in Judea was the lepta. It was a small copper coin with images on both sides. In the Gospels this is the coin the widow dropped into the Jerusalem temple treasury, providing Jesus with an example of sacrificial giving.



Figure 4.1. Bronze widow's mite or lepta

The image on one side is of a lamp, and on the other side the sun or perhaps a star. Jews in general did not approve of coins with human or “graven” images on them; hence observant Jews objected to using Caesar’s coins, which bore his image.

Money in the Jewish world of Jesus’ day had inherent negative associations, since it usually served as propaganda for a living pagan ruler. These coins were generally used to pay taxes, tolls, tributes, and tithes, and this contributed to their negative evaluation. Ancient economies were not predominantly money driven but oriented toward barter and a culture of patronage and reciprocity.

Rats scampered through the rubble, and vultures picked and fought over human flesh. Josiah, yielding to the tug of curiosity, climbed to a point where he could survey the damage at the top of the temple mount. The spectacle made even an old man like himself stand in awe. Later he would tell his friends:

“With the temple already burned, I guess the Romans decided to torch everything else that would burn . . . the porticoes, the gates—except on the east and south. Everything that would burn was smoldering, and everything else scorched. And the temple treasury too! Do you have any idea how much gold and silver and fine clothes and other valuables were laid in

there? Oh, I watched long ago when wealthy citizens hauled their treasure to the safety of the temple. It's all gone now!" ¹

Josiah recalled hearing the peasant prophet, Jesus son of Ananias. He had prophesied for over seven years in Jerusalem before this great calamity. He would stand in the temple precincts and cry out, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds: a voice against Jerusalem and the sanctuary, a voice against the bridegroom and the bride, a voice against all the people."² Despite the protests of the residents of Jerusalem, and despite a flogging from the governor Albinus, Jesus son of Ananias kept declaiming, "Woe to Jerusalem!" His cries were heard most loudly at the festivals. Finally, when the siege of the city had begun, he added, "Woe to me as well!" Josiah had heard that a huge stone from a Roman catapult struck and killed Jesus son of Ananias on the spot.

As Josiah was turning to climb down from his perch, he noticed that some Roman soldiers had set up their legionary standards in the temple court opposite the eastern gate. From a safe distance he continued to watch as they offered sacrifices to their gods. Then came shouts of acclamation to Titus, their imperator and conquering hero. A group of temple priests, who had evidently surrendered or been routed out of hiding, were marched before someone sitting in a chair. Could this be Titus? Josiah watched with rapt attention . . . then gasped, feeling his stomach lurch, as the priests were executed on the spot! But one of them was spared. What could be the meaning of this?

³

"So it has come to this," Josiah said quietly. As Jesus of Ananias said, God had abandoned his temple, his city, his people, and let them face the fury of Roma. The wizened old man fell to his knees and wept. His whole life he had lived in this city, and now, in the span of just a few days, it was gone. It began to dawn on Josiah that his begging days in Jerusalem were over. How would his people ever recover from this blow? On this day, with the stench of rotting flesh in his nostrils, and his eyes watering from the smoke of fires still smoldering on the temple mount, he could see no future for Zion. None at all. He pulled out a couple of the most recent coins he had collected in his beggar's bowl. One had been minted by the rebels during the revolt. The Hebrew inscription on it read "For the Freedom of Zion." Josiah tossed it away and sobbed.

A TALE OF LENTILS AND LENTELS



FOR JOANNA, MARY, AND MARTHA, the question was whether to risk flight or wait things out. For the time being, they decided to wait. Few Romans would waste their time on old women unless they were suspected of hiding a rebel or having vital information of their whereabouts.

“Where would we go?” Martha asked, gesturing for emphasis. “Isn’t all of Judea and Galilee crawling with Romans by now? And they are all on high alert. Any misstep might be fatal.”

“Well, we would need to leave the region altogether, presumably cross over the Jordan,” replied Mary calmly. “We could follow the prophecy, go to Pella. You know that is where some of our friends and followers of the Way said they were going.” This wasn’t the first time they had hashed things out in the past few days, but they seemed to keep returning to the topic.

“Do you really believe that prophecy?” Martha asked. “Where in the sacred writings do you ever read about Pella? Where did the Master ever mention it? Didn’t he say to flee to the mountains, not the Jordan Valley? Wouldn’t that mean something like Mount Nebo? These prophecies are too vague for my liking.”

“Nevertheless,” Joanna put in, “the future of Jerusalem is sealed. The Romans are not going away. What is our future here? We must get away!”

There was a sudden hammering on the door. The three women looked at each other, panic in their eyes. Martha reacted first. “Here, you put on your larger cloaks, and I will tell whoever is there that there are ill women in this place. He will take one look at feeble, wrinkled me and believe it.”

Mary and Joanna, without question or protest, did as Martha

instructed. Mary quickly unbraided her hair and shook it into a wild tangle. She deliberately scratched her own face and made her eyes water by taking a strong whiff of some of her most potent spices. All the while the pounding on the door continued. A deep voice shouted, "If you don't open this door at once, we will break it down."

"Coming," shouted Martha in her best Greek. Joanna grabbed her arm and whispered, "I'd best come to the door with you. I know Latin." Nodding agreement, Martha lifted the latch bolt on the door and opened it.

The soldier's fist was still raised to pound on the door when it opened. "Who is in this house?" he demanded. He towered over Martha by at least a foot. When she looked up to reply, he stepped back and gasped, "What's wrong with you? Have you some contagion?"

"This is the house of Simon the leper, who died of leprosy years ago, as did my brother Eliezer. We are just three women who are not well. You will not want to get too near us." Joanna and Mary joined Martha in the doorway.

"Look inside," invited Martha, "and you will see there is no one here but us."

"That's all right," said the centurion, covering his mouth with his red cape. "We can see none of you are well. *Vale*." He and his two companions left as quickly as they had come.

"Quick thinking," said Joanna with a smile as they closed and bolted the door.

"Well, it's the truth, isn't it? There really was leprosy in this household, and even without it, we aren't much to look at!"

■ ■ ■

Jason awoke to the sounds of chickens scratching and clucking. Emerging from the tent set up behind Miryam's house, he found her stirring a large pot of soup set on an open fire. The aroma was a painful reminder of his hunger.

"That smells delicious. Is it lentil soup?" asked Jason.

"Yes! With my favorite spices." Miryam beamed at the compliment.

"I'm so hungry, I could imitate Esau and sell my birthright for it."

"That won't be necessary," laughed Miryam.

Sarai emerged from the tent, her mantle wrapped around her head. Two little children followed her, rubbing their eyes.

“Sarai, would you get the bowls on the ledge, and some spoons, please?”

“Gladly,” said Sarai. “The soup smells wonderful. You must show me what you’ve put in.”

They all gathered with their bowls, each sitting on a little stone in a circle around where the pot was. Miryam said, “Jason, will you bless God for the food?”

Setting his bowl down, standing, and lifting up his hands, Jason said, “Blessed are thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. Amen.”

Miryam passed around bread as well. Soon the sound of contented slurping could be heard.

“Will you tell me your story now, as we break bread together?” said Miryam.

Jason put down his spoon. “There is not a lot to tell. Sarai and I are from the village of Arimathea, near Jerusalem, fleeing from the chaos like everyone else. Being from Jerusalem, you may even remember my uncle—Joseph. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, and he was gathered to our ancestors now some ten years ago. I see you have the sign of the fish on the lentel of your door, rather than a mezuzah. So I think you must be a follower of Yeshua, as Joseph was.”

Miryam was briefly taken aback. But, summoning up her courage, she said, “Yes, I am. I once was a leader of the female disciples of the Master. But how do you know about the Ichthus?”

Jason smiled, reassuring her. “Because my wife and I also became followers of the Master, under the influence of Joseph, now many years ago. We heard there were other followers here in Pella, and that is why we have chosen to come here.”

Ichthus, the Sign of the Fish

The Greek word *ichthys* has been taken since the time of the early church as not only a word in itself but as an acronym for the Greek *lēsous Christos, Theou Huios, Sōtēr* (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ), or “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.” While scholars

have debated whether this symbolic use of the Greek word for “fish” goes all the way back to the earliest Christians, we can say for sure that it was in use, even publicly, in the third century AD, as evidenced by a Greek grave stele of that time (see figure 5.1; a stele is a usually inscribed stone slab or pillar used for commemorative purposes, often gravestones). The stele of Licinius Amias probably dates from the early third century (so before Constantine), and the inscription at the top reads “Fish of the Living.” In addition to two fish, there is also an anchor, which was also a very early Christian symbol.



Figure 5.1. Image of an ichthys on a funerary stele (third century)

In his treatise *On Baptism*, Tertullian makes a pun on the word: “We, little fishes, after the example of our ΙΧΘΥΣ Jesus Christ, are born in water.”^a This pun on the word for “fish” corresponds well with the archaeological evidence. For instance, it can be inferred from Roman monumental sources such as the Cappella Greca and the Sacrament Chapels of the catacomb of Saint Callistus that the fish symbol was known to Christians very early on.

^aTertullian, *On Baptism* 1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. S. Thelwall (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885–1896; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 669.

Miryam sighed in relief. “Then it was the Lord who led you to me and my house. We do have a small Christian meeting group here in Pella. We meet in the house of Aristobolus, who lives across the way on that hill above the agora.”

“More, please,” interrupted little Jonah, sitting next to his mother. He had already managed to dribble some of the soup onto his tunic. Miryam smiled as she served him more. It looked like she might finally have some friends in Pella who were followers of Christ.

LEVI'S FLIGHT



LEVI WAS BEYOND FATIGUED. Every joint was stiff, every muscle sore. He had become closely acquainted with every feature of the cistern—now mostly dry—behind his house on Mount Zion. It was the evening of the third day after the sack of Jerusalem, and Levi had already drunk what little potable water had been in the cistern. This cramped silo had saved his life, but the noises, smells, and general chaos above had frayed his nerves and preyed on his mind.

For years Levi had lived on Zion. And while he continued to frequent the temple, he also participated in the increasingly secret gatherings of followers of the Master. When Jacob, the brother of Jesus, had been martyred some eight years earlier, some feared the Jerusalem assembly would disappear. But it had not, in part because some of the original disciples of Jesus stayed in Jerusalem despite opposition. But now, with these traumatic events, it seemed that Jerusalem was not going to survive as a religious home for anyone. Three days in the cistern had hardened Levi's resolve to gather up his few belongings and flee the shambles of the holy city.

Levi had had many hours to think over the events of recent years, as well as his own fate. He thought back to the last days of Jacob's life.¹ Levi, being a tax collector, but of priestly lineage, was disgusted with the whole line of Caiphas and Ananus, a family that for over thirty years had provided the high priests for Jerusalem. This same family had conspired to have Jesus killed.

Now it was Ananus's son, also named Ananus, a proud man of violent temper, who had seized the office of high priest. He had used the time between Festus's death and the arrival of Albinus, the new procurator of Judea, to take matters into his own hands. He went after Jacob, the head of the Jerusalem church, as well as some other

Jerusalem followers of Jesus. Jacob had been dragged before the Sanhedrin, accused of breaking the Torah, and stoned.² Later, when Albinus had read the letter of protest from righteous Jews who condemned this unjust action, Ananus was removed and replaced as high priest. Levi had been the scribe who composed the letter. Jacob had been buried near the spot where he had been martyred, and they had erected a grave stele there. Levi wondered whether it had survived the onslaught on the city.³

Sitting at the bottom of the cistern, Levi had wryly recollected the story of the prophet Jeremiah being imprisoned in a cistern before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. *I may not be a Jeremiah*, he thought, *but Jerusalem is replaying its tragedy*. Levi knew he had to flee the city. But how?

Like the Master, Levi had never married. This path came with its burdens, but he had focused his life on his tax collecting as well as on scribal work. For years he had thought about how he might write an account of Jesus. By habit he was a man with scrolls and parchments on his mind, and as the present disaster descended on Jerusalem, he had thought to visit and persuade John Mark's mother to entrust to him a copy of Mark's story of the good news of Jesus. It was a treasured account, based on Peter's preaching, and copies must be preserved. Levi was deeply familiar with it and continued to ponder how he might use it as a template for his own account. There was so much more to tell, but Mark's sprightly paced account would contribute much to what Levi wished to narrate, including Jesus' birth.

Levi decided he must do something, now. He began his ascent of the cistern wall. Each move was choreographed from practice. A handhold here, a secure foot placement there, a tricky reach and an awkward clambering over the lip of the pit, and he was out. His wiry old frame hurt from top to bottom, but he was whole. Under the cover of darkness he would try to get out of town. He knew a back way from Mount Zion to the Jericho road, and he thought he must take his chances on it. He prayed that the Roman troops would have grown tired of pillaging by now. Anyway, night was now approaching, so hopefully they would be feasting and sorting their booty. The mess they had created would take months to sort out.⁴ The Romans still had to rule the province, and Levi knew they did not like messes.

First-Century Houses

Quite a few first-century Jerusalem houses have now been excavated, and these can be compared with ones excavated at Capernaum as well. The results are similar. Most homes, even a larger one like the so-called Burnt House in Jerusalem, had only a few rooms or partitioned spaces, and they were quite small. There was a living area that included the cooking area near the door, as these houses did not have chimneys and in some cases did not have windows either. If the house was large enough, there was a guest room for extended family or visitors, and one major bedroom area (the family slept together, parents and children). Sometimes there was a partition in the back portion of the house, behind which would be kept a beast of burden to prevent it from being stolen.

In Luke's birth narrative story of Jesus (Lk 2:7) it is said that the baby was placed in a manger because there was no guest room available to them. This likely means that Jesus was born in the back of the house (probably of relatives) rather than in the guest room, because that room was already filled with guests (perhaps relatives from afar who had also come to register for the census).

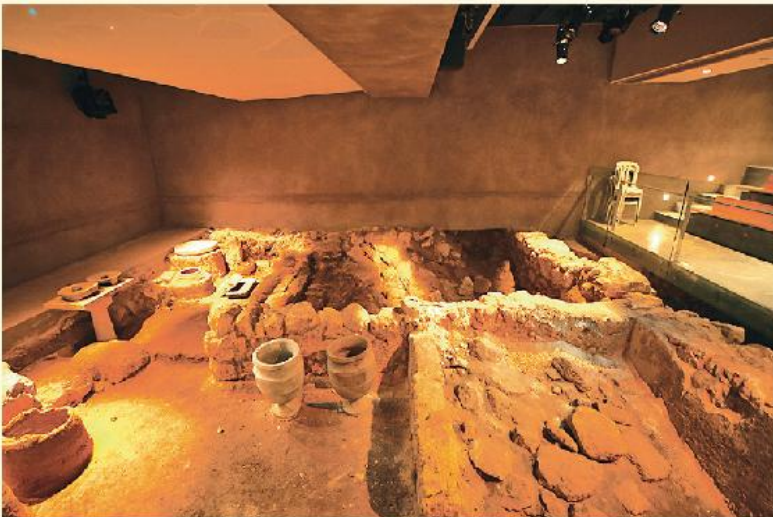


Figure 6.1. Remains of a first-century house interior in Jerusalem



Figure 6.2. Remains of first-century houses in Capernaum

An emaciated cock scurried underfoot, startling Levi. “How did you escape the stew pot for this long?” he wondered aloud—but then he remembered that this cock usually hid under his house to avoid the August heat.

Levi reached to open the door of his little house. His father, Alphaeus, had left it to him. His father had been in the regular priestly rota that served in the temple, and he had bought this little place a long time ago so he would have somewhere to stay when he came from Galilee to Jerusalem. It was not much, but conveniently located.

In the dimming light Levi grabbed a leather traveling bag and began filling it with the essentials he could afford to carry. His writing implements he put in a small metal case and then dropped them in the bag. Despite his weariness and hunger, his mind felt clear and sharp. He had rehearsed everything in the belly of the cistern. Carefully he extracted the scroll of Mark’s good news from its hiding place and slipped it into his leather bag, along with one other papyrus scroll.

To distract himself, Levi mulled over his plans to make his way to Capernaum via the long way, the King’s Highway, across the Jordan. It seemed a prudent route. Would it be the last time he would ever see Jerusalem? Would the temple ever be restored? Reason told him it was unlikely. His heart hoped he was wrong.

Tax Collecting in Jesus' World

Tax collecting in antiquity did not work the same way it does today in America or Europe. "Tax farming" was the normal practice. The governing officials contracted with private individuals to do the tax collecting for them, going house to house and estate to estate. The agreements could vary, but in Galilee it seems the governing official would set an amount of tax he expected the tax collector to provide him, with any additional amount being the tax collector's cut. This practice led to all kinds of corruption and gouging, and it was another reason why the Jewish populace despised tax collectors and lumped them together with sinners and traitors. We might imagine the animus was especially strong in Judea because the tax money was going directly to a Roman procurator, who was not a Jew at all (unlike the Herods, who at least had some Jewish blood in their lineage, though they were mostly Idumeans).



Figure 6.3. Both sides of a Roman coin (circa 225-212 BC)

In addition to collecting taxes on land and possessions, there was toll collecting in border regions. When a person crossed the border, say from the territory of Herod Philip to the territory of Herod Antipas, they had to pay a toll. Finally, there were temple taxes. Jews were expected to pay money into the temple treasury as part of their service to God, money that in part went to the maintenance and upkeep of the temple. It appears to have been a new practice in Jesus' day to have moneychangers, in addition to sellers of animals, within the outer court of the Jerusalem temple precincts. The Tyrian shekel or half-shekel was the coin used to pay the temple tax in Jerusalem. Even though it had on it an image of a pagan demigod (Herakles/Hercules) and an eagle, a symbol of pagan power, it was made of the purest silver, and for the temple authorities that consideration overrode its pagan

imagery. Thus the moneychangers offered the service of exchanging ordinary coins for the Tyrian shekel in order to pay the tax.

Rustling through a bag of items, he located his seal. Granted to him by the administration of Herod Antipas, the seal symbolized his authority to collect taxes in Galilee. He hoped it would still earn him some small status with any Roman authorities he might encounter, since Herod had been a client king of Roma. Surely any official of Herod would be assumed to be an ally of Titus and his efforts to subdue rebels. Of course, Levi had not been collecting taxes for Herod for many years. But Roman soldiers would not know this. Levi was banking on it giving him some immunity against being abused or taken prisoner.

The sun had now descended over the western edge of the holy city, and in the twilight Levi picked his way along. He would be heading northeast, down the Jericho road. It was a regular commuter route for priests and Levites. Many of them could not afford to live on Mount Zion and thus lived in Jericho, commuting back and forth as the rota called them to duty in the temple. He hoped for some traffic he could blend in with.

As Levi reached the last vista of the city on the Jericho road, he paused and looked back at the darkening profile of the city. Throat tightening, he whispered, "Farewell, once-great city." All the obedience to Torah, all the sacrifices, all the prayers . . . what did any of that mean now? What had it accomplished, if this was the city's end?

Even at this hour there were old men and young men, old women and young women, small children and infants, traveling down the road. The way through the wilderness was moving in the wrong direction. Instead of fleeing Egypt, God's people were fleeing their own capital city! The dust kicked up by the refugees hung in the evening air; the sounds of sandals, hooves, and wheels were accented by coughs and wheezes. Where would they all go? Where would they sleep tonight, if they did? Levi pulled the edge of his cloak over his mouth and joined the traffic.

Levi planned to keep going all the way to Jericho this very night.

The journey of about seventeen miles was almost entirely downhill, and with this many people traveling, dangers from bandits and thieves were minimized. But the thirty-two-hundred-foot descent from Jerusalem to Jericho would take its toll. Three days in a cistern had depleted his energy reserves.

It took him six hours to make the descent to Jericho, and even by the second hour his anxiety had slackened. While he did not see anyone he knew among his fellow travelers, their presence was reassuring. As he approach Jericho, the moon was shining high in the sky, as it was well into the evening, perhaps even midnight. He began to wonder where he might stay for the night. In happier days the famous inn at Jericho would have been an option, but with the flood of refugees entering Jericho, it was out of consideration.⁵

Levi knew where most of the priests lived: on the far side of the city, near the creek bed. He decided to try there first, appealing to his priestly lineage. As he passed an ancient sycamore tree, he recalled that Zaccheus, another tax collector, had once lived in this town. He and his family had become followers of Jesus. That was more than forty years in the past—but still, Levi's memory fetched up a general recollection of where they had lived. He would try to find their house first.

Rummaging through his bag, he pulled out his little hand lamp and a stoppered vial of oil. Stopping by a brazier where some travelers had been warming their hands in the chilly evening air, he lit the wick. With his lit hand lamp in one hand and his bag over his opposite shoulder, Levi made his way to the neighborhood and, after some wrong turns and backtracking, found a familiar-looking home. Taking confidence in the faint image of a fish on the door, illuminated by his flickering lamp, he knocked. After a minute or two, the door cracked open partway, and the voice of an elderly woman whispered, "Who is there?"

"It is Levi, a follower of the Master. Have you a floor for me to sleep in safety tonight?"

The door opened wider, and suddenly there was a blaze of light from a hanging collection of lamps in the center of the room. Blinking hard to see, Levi found standing there to greet him the stooped figures of Zaccheus and his wife. Levi stepped into the house and pulled back his hood so they could see his face clearly. Only then did he realize

that his hand was paining him from hours of holding a death grip on his bag—but it was worth it to protect the scroll inside with Mark's story.

RESPIRE IN JERICHO



AFTER A FEW HOURS' REST, Levi found himself sitting in front of a breakfast of warm bread, goats' milk, and some dried dates. Zaccheus's wife, Ruth, was still spry enough to serve as hostess. As Levi's hunger began to be satiated, he could think more clearly about the events that had driven him to Zacchaeus and Ruth.

"I imagine you have heard all about the disaster in Jerusalem by now," he said.

Ruth shook her head in sorrow. "People have been talking of nothing else for the last two days. Refugees have streamed into town. The city officials have exhausted their charitable resources already!" Levi nodded, unsurprised.

Ruth's countenance brightened. "But you will never guess who is just down the road in the Jericho Inn—Miryam, Martha, and Joanna! We have invited them to come join us for a midday meal after they have recovered from their traveling."

The conversation carried on for a while, but Levi was still so tired that he was not his usual loquacious self. When he sat back on his mat after eating, the next thing Ruth heard from him was a little snore as he dozed off.

When midday arrived, there was a knock on the door, startling Levi out of his rest. He sat up straight, rubbing his eyes, and saw Zacchaeus ushering Joanna, Miryam, and Martha into the house.

Levi stood up quickly to properly welcome the ladies. After standard greetings were exchanged and they all sat down, he asked Joanna, who was nearest to him, "How did you come to be here in Jericho? Rumor had it that you and your husband had gone all the way to Roma for Paul. When did you return to Judea?"

Joanna smiled as Ruth handed her a bowl and said, "We did

indeed go to Roma. We were coworkers of Paul for a long time—we even landed in a jail with him once.”

“What, a Jewish woman in a Roman jail cell? Really?” said Levi.

“Yes, it’s amazing what trouble a woman can get into! I found opportunities to bear witness to the Master among women of means in Ephesos, Philippi, and Thessalonike.” The light in her eyes dimmed briefly. “In Thessalonike some of those new followers of Jesus even lost their lives when persecution arose.”¹

Suddenly the light dawned on Zaccheus’s wife: “Wait a minute. Are you the Joanna who traveled with the Master? I’ve heard that you later married a man named Andronicus and . . . you became an apostle?”

Joanna swallowed the bite she had taken and blushed. “Yes, I went by Junia when we were in Rome.² . . . Saying that I became an apostle, it sounds so grand. It really wasn’t. We were doing the Lord’s work as best we could. My husband was martyred in Rome during the crackdown by Nero a few years ago, and so I came to Jerusalem. Until only a few days ago I had been caring for my ailing sister. But she has gone to be with the Lord, so there is nothing for me in Jerusalem anymore—especially now.”

“I am sorry to hear of the loss of your sister,” said Levi, and Zacchaeus and Ruth murmured their condolences as well. As Joanna responded in turn, Levi reached into his worn leather bag. “You all may be interested to hear a certain passage from Paul’s letter to the Roman churches.”

Martha was so excited she could hardly speak. “You have a copy?! We read that scroll in our Jerusalem house assembly—that and John Mark’s account of the Master’s life!”

Levi smiled slyly and patted his bag, setting his bowl aside. “Here I have both of those very documents.” He cleared his throat. “Now, allow me the honor of reading to you.”

“Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.” The room was silent as the meaning sank in.

“Joanna, were you among those Saul persecuted before he turned to the Lord?” asked Zacchaeus.

“Yes, we were,” replied Joanna. “We ended up working with Saul

beginning with his second journey to share the good news about Jesus. As some of you know, I was among the women who first saw Jesus when he arose from the dead. Andronicus and I were married not long thereafter. So we had been followers of Jesus for some years prior to Jesus' revelation to Saul on Damascus Road."³

"The forgiveness of the Lord at work among his people, binding them together," said Levi softly. "But where will you women go now?"

Martha quickly replied, "We have resolved to leave this promised land, at least for a time, while this war finishes . . . badly, as usual, for our people. We will journey on to Pella to join other followers of the Lord there, following the prophecy. And you?"

Levi looked up, stroked his chin beard and said, "I have decided to go back to Capernaum. I am sure there are still followers of Jesus there. I ask you to pray for me, as I have a job to do. I feel that I too must compile a story about Jesus, and I will use Mark's work and a few other resources to compose the document. But while we are here tonight, I would love to hear from any of you about the teachings of the Master you have heard or recall."

Oral Culture in Israel

The literacy rate in ancient biblical cultures seems to have ranged from about 5 to 20 percent, depending on the specific culture and subgroup. Not surprisingly, then, all ancient peoples, whether literate or not, preferred the living word—which is to say the spoken word. Texts were enormously expensive to produce. Papyrus was expensive, ink was expensive, and scribes were ultra-expensive. No wonder Jesus said to his audiences, "Let those who have ears listen." He never said, "Let those who have eyes read." Most eyes could not read in the biblical period.

So far as we can tell, few if any documents in antiquity were read silently, and only some were intended for private reading. Texts were meant to be read aloud, usually to a group. For the most part texts were necessary stand-ins for oral communication. This was particularly true of ancient letters.

In fact, most ancient documents, including letters, were not really texts in the modern sense at all. They were composed with

their aural and oral potential in mind, and they were meant to be orally delivered when they arrived at their destination. Thus, for example, when we read the opening verses of Ephesians—loaded as they are with aural devices (assonance, alliteration, rhythm, rhyme, various rhetorical devices)—it becomes clear that no one was ever meant to hear this in any language but Greek, and it was not meant to be read silently. It needed to be heard.

There was a further reason it needed to be delivered orally—in part because of the cost of making documents, a standard letter in Greek would have no separation of words, sentences, paragraphs, or the like, little or no punctuation, and all capital letters. For example, imagine having to sort out a document that began as follows:

PAULASERVANTOFCHRISTJESUSCALLEDTOBEANAPOSTLEANDSET

The only way to decipher such a collection of letters was to sound them out.

There was a moment of silence. Then Joanna smiled and said, “I will make a start. Let me tell you the story of the Canaanite woman. Jesus told it to Miryam and me when he returned from Tyre. The story goes like this.” She began:

Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.”

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” He answered, “I was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel.”

The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

“That’s very interesting,” said Levi. “There is a very similar story in Mark’s account—only in Mark’s version, the woman is called a Syro-Phoenician woman.”

“Well, of course,” replied Joanna. “That is what the residents in Roma would call such a woman. Syrian Phoenicians live in Syria, and

Labo-Phoenicians live on the north coast of the land west of Egypt. I expect Mark wanted to write in a way his Roman audience could understand.”

“Hmm,” said Levi. “Mark’s version also doesn’t have anything about the male disciples. Other places, to be sure, Mark seems perfectly willing to show the flaws of the Twelve. But here he spares them the embarrassment that apparently was part of the story.” There was a moment of quiet as they all pondered, then Zacchaeus spoke up.

“The thing I find strange is Jesus’ brusque manner. That seems at odds with the way he otherwise treated women,” said Zaccheus.

“Perhaps he was testing the woman to see whether she would respond in faith, as he once tested me,” Martha interjected. “And apparently she passed the test—but the male disciples did not. This is why I prefer the oral stories to some written text. Just by reading those words on a scroll, you can’t tell Jesus’ tone of voice or his manner when he spoke. Perhaps Jesus was testing the male disciples to see whether they would have compassion on the woman, as he did. Maybe he was voicing their thoughts, not his own, when he said ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.’”

Scratching his beard, Levi replied, “Perhaps. But you have to admit it is a strange story. Why in the world was Jesus by the city of Tyre in the first place?”

“Perhaps he was weary of all the rejection in Galilee, even in his hometown?” mused Miryam.

The conversation continued as they took turns recalling their memories of Jesus and his teachings. The discussion served to prevent them all from thinking about how Jericho, where they all now sat together, once Israel’s ancient entry point into the promised land, was now an exit point for these people of God on their way into exile, following the destruction the Master they spoke of had foretold.

PROPHECY AND INTERPRETATION



ON THE FOURTH DAY after the sacking of the city, Josephus sat in Titus's spacious tent, awaiting instructions from the general. It was already a very hot August morning on the top of the Mount of Olives, and Josephus was sipping some *poska*, the Roman beverage of wine vinegar with spices. His mind was on how exactly he was going to write about what had just transpired in Jerusalem. It was going to be tricky. On the one hand, it would be dangerous to criticize the Romans for what they had done. On the other hand, as a Jew he hoped to make clear that the blame for the disaster in Jerusalem should be laid at the door of only the Zealots, not Jews in general.

A weak breeze caught up the tent flap, giving Josephus a momentary glimpse of the smoldering ruins of the city.

The image of feet suddenly blocked Josephus's view. Titus entered to his tent in full regalia. Addressing his armor bearer, he said, "Marcus, take this off me at once! This beastly Judean heat! It's all I can do to stand in this armor under that blazing sun."

Titus's cupbearer, a young man named Decimus, was at the ready as usual. He handed Titus a silver goblet of wine. Titus drank deeply. Once his armor was off, he relaxed and shook out his limbs, sitting down with a groan.

"So, will you come with me to Roma and celebrate our triumph there?" Titus asked, with a wink in the direction of Josephus. He frequently took pleasure in taunting Josephus, as a member of the people they had just conquered, though an educated one.

Josephus was also named Titus. While his Jewish name was Yosef ben Matityahu, his Roman name was Titus Flavius Josephus. Born in Jerusalem a few years after the death of Jesus, Josephus was approaching his thirtieth year when he was enlisted to aid Titus in trying to convince the Jews holed up in Jerusalem to surrender and prevent further bloodshed. In this Josephus failed miserably. The Jews of the revolt were obdurate to the end, and some of the principals even escaped to fight another day, at Masada. Josephus was granted Roman citizenship by Vespasian's son Titus, and he quickly became an adviser and friend of Titus, serving as his translator when Titus led the siege of Jerusalem. There were not many Jews prepared to help the Romans who were literate and fluent in Greek as well as Aramaic and Hebrew. Growing up in a wealthy, priestly family in Jerusalem (Josephus was a direct descendant of the high priest Jonathan from the Hasmonean era), Josephus's natural inclination would have been against Zealots of all sorts. This makes it something of a mystery that he took up the cause of the Zealots when the war began and led an army in Galilee.

"If that is what my lord would wish, I would be honored," said Josephus with a weary smile. "Certainly, there is no more future for me here in my hometown of Jerusalem." He paused. "My lord, whatever is next, I wish to reiterate that I am truly grateful for your granting to me Roman citizenship in exchange for my meager help in this venture. And I hope you will find it pleasing to hear that I have taken the Roman name Titus Flavius Josephus."

"That is good. I was hoping you would come around to seeing things my way." Unlike his younger brother, Domitian, Titus was fairly affable in nature, more like their father, Vespasian. Also like his father, he was a good soldier. He took another drink and stretched his limbs with a brief grimace.

"So what will you do if you come to Roma with me?"

"With your kind permission, I will write up an account in Greek of your great triumphs here in Judea and in Galilee. Something like Caesar's account of his wars in Gaul." Josephus paused, choosing his words carefully. "I will talk about how it is futile for a people,

including my people, to resist God's will and fate when it should be apparent to all that divine favors rests on the progress of Roma. When the story is told of the past century, it will be a story of the rise of your empire." An idea came to him suddenly. "In fact, did you know, your Majesty, that there is an ancient prophecy in our book of Daniel that speaks of the Roman Empire?"

"Is there indeed? And what might this Jewish prophecy say?"

"It is written in Aramaic, but if you like, I can read it to you."

"By all means. By all means. Read away."

Reaching into his scroll basket, Josephus found the one he needed and unrolled it. "Daniel was a prophet who was in exile in Babylon, and he had visions. Here is what he says about one of them:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off, and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it.

And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, "Get up and eat your fill of flesh!" After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.

While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being—

"Who are these so-called beasts in these visions?" demanded Titus.

"They represent empires, Majesty," replied Josephus. "As I understand the prophecy, the first of these empires is the Babylonian one, the second the Persian one, the third Alexander's empire, and the fourth is Roma. Notice the reference to the great power and fierce nature of the fourth beast, which has iron teeth and tramples everything in its path." He looked at the scroll again. "See too that we are told it is different from the three previous beasts in various ways.

Note the ten horns, a reference to power distributed to ten.”

“Like, say, ten Roman provinces?” said Titus, catching on.

“Possibly, or perhaps ten rulers. Did you catch the reference to three horns being uprooted by another one, a little horn?”

“That must refer to the year of the three emperors, and how my own father—short of stature—displaced them!”

“Some things are opaque about the prophecy, but that line seems most clear to me as well,” said Josephus, smiling. “This is the very prophecy that prompted me to predict that your father would be made emperor. And it did indeed come to pass!”

“So even your god recognizes and favors the rise of Roma?” Titus raised his eyebrows.

“It would seem so, Majesty. It would seem so.”

“In any case, we must celebrate this victory.” His expression clouded. “But I will have to dispatch someone else to chase down those infernal bandits who escaped.”

“If I may be so bold, Majesty, perhaps you could send several cohorts or a legion with Flavius Silva to run them into the ground. He’s a good commander. And surely your father would approve.”

“A good idea. I will write him. And I will take it that you will come with me in the new year, when sailing is possible again. We have much to do here to finish this job entirely and secure the land. We cannot make it before the sailing season on *Mare Nostrum*¹ ends in another month.”

“Very wise. I would not want to sail in the offseason.”

Titus stood up, as did Josephus in response. This was the signal that this audience was over. “I must go check on my horse. He seems to have come up lame yesterday. But why don’t you begin gathering your notes for the tale of the Jewish wars. I shall look forward to reviewing your work in due course, when we get back to Rome.”

Josephus nodded and watched Titus leave the tent without so much as a *vale*. Sighing with relief, Josephus thought to himself, *Well, at least with the patronage of Titus I shall land safely on my feet in the Pax Romana.*² But my reading of that prophecy had better be right! ³

Sailing in the Mediterranean was a dangerous proposition, especially in a small boat or in the offseason. For safety's sake, the ideal sailing season fell between May 27 and September 14. So in our story Titus says he would need to wait until the new year to sail home, in the spring of AD 71. Soldiers or grain being transported in an emergency situation might sail as late as October or as early as April, when conditions might be marginally acceptable. Winter storms made sailing very hazardous throughout December, January, and February.

There were no passenger ships per se in antiquity. Travelers secured passage on merchant ships, usually large grain freighters. Only the larger boats actually sailed across the Mediterranean Sea from Egypt in a diagonal line to Italy. All other boats avoided open-sea crossings, sailing point to point along the coastlines of Palestine, Asia Minor, and Greece. Paul, for instance, took a grain freighter from Patara to Tyre on his way to Jerusalem. On a big vessel, and with prevailing winds, it was a five-day journey to sail from Rome to Corinth, and ten days from Rome to Alexandria in Egypt.

Most travelers on large ships were simply deck passengers who slept on the open deck or under makeshift tents. They would travel with basic cookware, food, bathing items, and a little bedding as well. A very large vessel, say a slave ship, might hold up to six hundred people, but this was exceptional.

Ships rarely sailed on a predictable schedule, being subject to both wind and calm. Consequently, getting passage could be an ordeal. Travelers would hang out in a port until the captain announced the departure. The winds and tides would wait for no one, and when they were favorable, not a moment was to be lost.

The hazards of sailing are depicted in the dramatic story of Paul's shipwreck (Acts 27:13-44). When a boat encountered fierce gales, the safest option was to run with the wind and hope to avoid a leeward shore. Ancient ships were not designed to sail as directly into the wind, as modern sailing vessels are. Those who attempted sea travel knew they were taking their lives in their hands.^a

^aOn all this see the relevant passages in my commentary on *The Acts of the*

Apostles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), and for an interesting recent account of a scholar who has retraced the sailing journeys of Paul, see L. Stutzman, *With Paul at Sea: Learning from the Apostle Who Took the Gospel from Land to Sea* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012).

VISITORS IN WORSHIP



MIRYAM FOUND HERSELF something of a tour guide for her guests as they acclimated to Pella. Arranging a little time away from her children, Sarai went for a walk with Miryam through town. Their conversation inclined toward the patterns of worship in this Hellenistic city.

“Pella is a town with gods to suit anyone,” Miryam told Sarai. “The most recent is the temple dedicated to the worship of the Emperor Augustus and his successors. There seems to be a lot of money here going toward building that temple.”

“What about a synagogue?” Sarai asked. “There are Jews here, aren’t there?”

“There are some, but there have never been enough Jews in Pella to build a synagogue. In some ways, actually, that makes it easier for me and our fellow Christ followers here. We don’t have to deal with quarrels with synagogue officials. And since there has never been a synagogue here, we Jesus followers met in a home from the start.”

While Miryam was happy to be part of the weekly worship and fellowship in Pella, she felt a pang as she thought of the Jerusalem community and its worship. Here there were no apostles, nor any of the family of Jesus, so the excitement of being at the center of the Jesus movement was missing. In most ways the meetings here were like normal synagogue meetings.

Religion in Pella

Many religions coexisted in Pella in the first century. The oldest religion in town was Greek, since Pella was one of the ten cities of the Decapolis. But there was also a much more recent Roman temple to Mars, in addition to the temple of Augustus that Joanna

mentions. Some of the old gods of the region were worshiped as well, and there was also an ancient Canaanite temple.

This was typical of the polytheistic environment of the Roman empire, where both the emperor cult and the Christian faith were new additions to the pluralistic religious scene. Peaceful coexistence was possible as long as no one religion claimed preeminence—a problem for both Jews and Christians.

The emperor cult, too, created problems for Christians—especially non-Jewish Christians, since Jews were exempt from the emperor cult. The Christians in Pella, though, were probably not facing ultimatums about emperor worship in the AD 70s.

“Perhaps you and Jason could come with me to the meeting tonight? We worship at night, but on the first day of the week rather than on the night of Shabbat. Our worship here is a lot like that in Jerusalem—after all, most of us originally worshiped in Jerusalem before we had to leave.”

Sarai took a deep breath and said, “I’d better not tonight—the children are a bit unsettled and insecure at this point—but I’m sure Jason will be pleased to come with you.” They turned back toward home.

■ ■ ■

The walk across the valley and up the steep hill followed a ridge path, and it took Miryam and Jason some time. The sun was setting earlier now, and cooler weather was beginning to set in. Miryam had brought a couple of hand lamps and some oil for their trip home from the meeting.

“I’ve noticed a number of people seem to be making their living from vineyards and olive trees,” said Jason as they walked.





Figure 9.1. First-century oil lamps

“Yes. And in my case, as you may have gathered, making and repairing women’s clothes has kept me fed and sheltered for a good while now. Your wife could perhaps help me with that, but we would need to find some more clients.”

Jason considered this. “It’s hard to know how long we will be in Pella. Even the prophecy didn’t tell us how long to stay, only to flee here.”

“Yes, as specific as that prophecy was, it doesn’t tell us everything we need to know,” Miryam responded, thinking aloud. “I guess that’s part of God’s design. If we knew everything in advance, we would not need to live by faith each and every day.”

Jason laughed and replied, “Yes, God does tend to reveal enough to give us hope, but not so much that we don’t have to live by faith. That’s probably a good thing.”

Villas

The classic design of a villa included the following elements: the entranceway, the *impluvium* in the atrium, the *tablinum*, the *triclinium*, the peristyle garden in the courtyard, the kitchens, the master’s study, the upstairs bedrooms, and the back gardens, to mention just a few of the rooms.

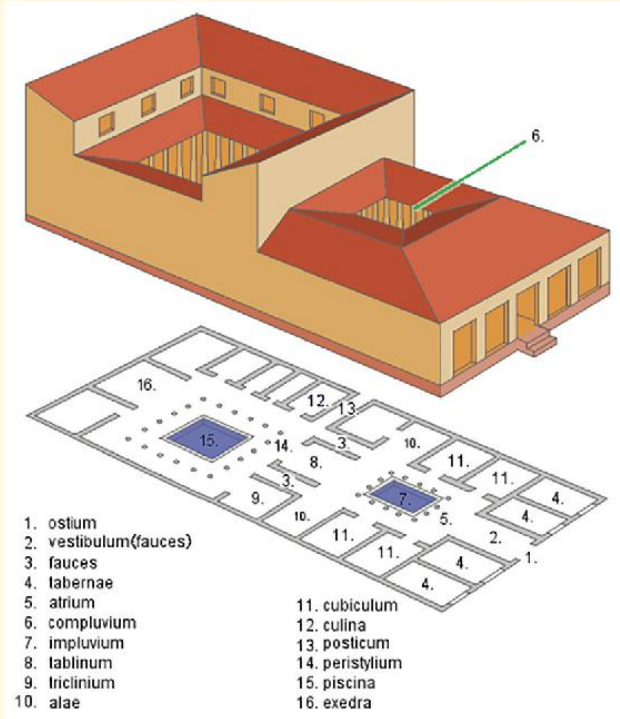


Figure 9.2. Schematic of a Roman villa

Miryam took the climb to the top of the ridge with the practiced pacing of a woman her age. Reaching the top of the ridge, she turned to take in the reward. The sun was setting over the Jordan River, with the promised land in the distance.

Aristobolus's villa, with its brick walls and tiled roof, had come into view. Classic in its proportions, it was tastefully modest by Roman standards. On its southern and western exposures it was shaded by trees, and its setting at this elevation took full advantage of the hillside breezes—not to speak of a commanding view of the valley below. In the cooling refreshment of the evening air, its relative seclusion made it an exceptional venue for worship.

A servant was at the door, ready to admit the guests with a warm greeting. Miryam felt her pulse quicken as she returned the greeting. She always felt out of her element in this wealthy man's house. Jason looked uncomfortable as well, so she whispered to him, "Don't you feel a bit out of place here? I grew up in a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee, in such a humble little house. But Aristobolus and his wife, Ariadne, couldn't be kinder. They know how to put people at ease.

You'll see."

Miryam had often noticed that even Aristobolus's servants seemed content and cheerful. It was easy to sense when servants were being mistreated, she thought. It showed in their faces, their posture, and their general demeanor.

As they entered the atrium, Aristobolus and Ariadne were there to greet her with a kiss and a welcome for Miryam's new friend. Others stood beyond them with anointing oil, ready to anoint the head, hands, and feet of anyone who desired it.

In addition to greeting those who were entering, Aristobolus was also introducing people to a friend he had invited for the evening, named Julius, with whom he had long worked in Pella. Julius was a Roman, but he had an interest in "Eastern sects."

Slaves in a Christian Household

In thinking about how early Christians approached slavery, we need to bear in mind that the so-called household codes in Colossians 3–4 and Ephesians 5–6 reflect an existing social situation, into which Paul injects some Christian sense and compassion. These household codes are an attempt to modify and make an existing social situation less abusive. They are "in-house" codes, intended for Christian households. Paul and other early Christians saw no immediate opportunity to change the social institutions of the empire. They did not live in a democratic world but one where authoritarian and totalitarian government was the norm.

Not surprisingly, then, the New Testament has little to say in the abstract about slaves or slavery. The only time the subject comes up directly is when there are slaves in a Christian household. Accordingly, there is no comment in the New Testament about slaves working in the mines or on ships or in other such venues that tended to be much more difficult and life threatening than domestic service. Nor, on the other hand, does the New Testament speak of domestic slaves who are rhetoricians or tutors. Domestic workers seem to be the only type of slaves commented on in Colossians 3–4 and Ephesians 5–6.

When we compare the household codes in Paul's letters with other Greco-Roman texts, such as the advice given by a Plutarch or a Seneca on household management, there are striking differences. The pagan household codes do not give commands or orders to the head of the household. Instead, the heads of the households are given advice on how to keep their wives, children, and slaves in line. Nowhere is the master commanded to treat his slaves as persons rather than property, and nowhere are children treated as moral agents who must be respected. In other words, in pagan codes the exhortations are for the subordinate members of the patriarchal household. Nowhere do we hear exhortations to love one's wife and consider one's own body as belonging to the wife. Neither do we hear exhortations to treat and serve one's slaves as one would want to be treated and served, bearing in mind one has a heavenly master. Nor do we hear exhortations to mutual submission between husbands and wives (cf. Eph 5:21) or to not be overbearing with one's children. Yet we hear all this and more in Paul's household codes. Clearly Paul is trying to reform and revise the existing household structure from within the context of the Christian household.^a

^aFor much more on this see Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

Julius turned out to be a diminutive man, barely over five feet tall, with close-cropped, curly black hair. He wore a clean white toga with a green border. Nearsightedness caused him to squint, which made him appear furtive or worried. Miryam's internal alarm system responded. She did not like the look of the man. Remembering the word of the Master about not prejudging people, she resolved to keep an open mind. But she could not help watching the man closely and worrying that this visitor might lead to trouble.

As was the community's custom, their worship was wrapped around a common meal. It was nothing short of spectacular. The main dish was turbot in a favorite pickled fish sauce called *garum*, which also went well with meat or even bread. The meal reminded Miryam of her home in Migdal, where a large fish factory was adjacent to the

Gourmet *Garum*

Garum was made from the intestines of small fish and was produced through a process of bacterial fermentation.^a Fishermen laid out their catch according to the type and part of the fish. This allowed makers to pick the exact ingredients they wanted. The fish parts were then covered in salt. Curing in the sun was a long process, lasting from one to three months. In the heat of the sun the mixture fermented and then liquefied, with the salt inhibiting decay. *Garum*, then, was the clear liquid that bubbled to the top. It was drawn off by means of a strainer inserted into the fermenting vessel. The sediment that remained was called *allec*. Concentrated essences of aromatic herbs might be added. Flavors would vary according to the locale, with ingredients coming sometimes from one's own garden. The end product was very nutritious, very high in protein and amino acids along with minerals and B vitamins. *Garum* was also very rich in glutamic acid, making its use similar to modern monosodium glutamate. As with olive oil, there were various grades and qualities of *garum*, but a wealthy person like Aristobolus could afford the best.



Figure 9.3. Garum jugs

^aSee Robert I. Curtis, "The Garum Shop of Pompeii," *Cronache Pompeiane* 31, no. 94 (1979); see especially 5-23. See also Curtis's later work, "Spanish Trade

Miryam made a point of complimenting Aristobolus and Ariadne on the wonderful food. She noted with satisfaction that the guests were all served the same food—often not the case in the highly stratified Roman world, where one's place at dinner and even the quality of one's food often depended on one's social position.

"Tell me where you got that *garum*," said Miryam to Ariadne. "I've never tasted a fish sauce with so much flavor!"

"We import ours straight from Baetia, and since Aristobolus has an import-export business, we are able to get the best. I can tell you, though, that over the last three to four years it's been harder to come by due to all the troubles in Judea. Business has slowed down for both merchants and suppliers, since we are a good distance from any port on Mare Nostrum." Miriam nodded in response and continued savoring her food.

The teacher on this evening was a man named Agabus, now quite aged. He was revered for having known not only the original Jerusalem apostles but also Paul, and for having spoken famous prophecies in both Antioch and elsewhere in Syria. Agabus made for a strange dinner guest, dressed as he was in a tattered outer garment, and with his scraggly beard, bald head, missing teeth, and notably foul odor. For some reason, Aristobolus had positioned him on the couch directly across from Julius, which made for quite the contrast with the neatly coiffed Roman in the expensive toga. Miryam watched as Julius kept trying to engage Agabus in conversation. But Agabus, being quite deaf, only spoke to the others immediately to his right, quite loudly. Julius eventually quit trying to speak to Agabus, turning away with a small frown on his face.

The time came for worship proper, and everyone adjourned to the peristyle, where the servants had set up benches for those who wanted to sit. Agabus, as was the Jewish custom, chose to sit while he taught. He was placed at the very end of the peristyle so everyone could see him. It made for a dramatic scene, since many had brought their hand lamps from the table to the peristyle; from Agabus's end on down there appeared to be a long line of winking stars along each side of

the garden.

Agabus had a good loud voice, and he began with a brief prayer, lifting up his hands to heaven.

“Lord, we ask for your presence and that of your Spirit here tonight. We know you are King of kings and Lord of lords, and we ask that you would rule and overrule this time of teaching, so that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts might be acceptable in your sight. Amen.”

Dinner Discrimination

A famous epigram of the Roman pundit Martial attests to the stratification typically evident in Roman meals: “Seeing that I am invited to dinner, and am no longer, as before, to be bought, why is not the same dinner given to me, as to you? You partake of oysters fattened in the Lucrine lake; I tear my lips in sucking at a limpet. Before you are placed splendid mushrooms; I help myself to such as are fit only for pigs. You are provided with a turbot; I with a sparulus. The golden turtle-dove fills your stomach with its over-fattened body; a magpie which died in its cage is set before me. Why do I dine without you, Ponticus, when I dine with you? Let it be of some profit to me that the sportula exists no longer; let us eat of the same dishes.”^a

^a*The Epigrams of Martial* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), 159.

He cleared his throat. “There are other prophets, by which I mean other than myself, among us this evening. Let one come forward and offer a word of knowledge before I begin to teach.”

Almost immediately a beautiful young woman, evidently a slave, stood up and began speaking: “Beware of the wolves—those who prey on the weak and lead astray God’s sheep. Beware of the wealthy and powerful who take advantage of the poor and defraud the widow. Beware of false friends like Judas, ready to betray a person for their own ends. Keep watch, be vigilant, for you know not the hour in which the wolf will strike.”

Her warning clearly enunciated, she sat down and spoke no more the rest of the evening. Agabus commended her for the useful warning and then said, “Friends, we are gathered here by our gracious hosts to worship our Master, of whom we are all servants. My teaching tonight will be based on one of his more famous parables, the parable of the pleading widow and the unjust judge. In case you do not remember the story, let me tell it once more . . .

“In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’ And the Master added, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?’”

Agabus folded his hands in his lap and began his teaching. “You might be tempted to think that Jesus was making the sort of complaint that we too often hear about women—namely that they nag away at us men until they get what they want. But notice that it is this woman and her persistence that is being presented as an example for us to follow. The story is about vindication and how widows are often taken advantage of by unscrupulous men. For example, they are often defrauded of property when their husbands die.

“Now the way the Jewish law works, as many of you know, is that whoever goes to the judge first and gets in a claim for some property is more likely to get it, especially if the judge himself is unscrupulous, like the one in the story. Though, of course, many judges do their best to be fair.”

Julius was sitting close by, listening to this tale and its explanation, and Miryam noticed he was shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

“As the story is told, the widow is already in difficulty because she did not get to the judge first, and the person who did is her ‘adversary,’ as the story says. Not merely a claimant, but an adversary.

In other words, there is trouble. Now the judge is tempted to just ignore the woman or dismiss her as being too late. But the problem is, when he tries this tactic, she just keeps coming back . . . and coming back . . . and coming back. Like an annoying fly that won't stop. Even though the man ignores the real G-d and doesn't much care what the general public thinks of him, he is apparently a vain man, a man who doesn't like being showed up or shamed in public. And certainly not by an old woman. In fact, he admits he had better give her what she wants before she comes and punches him in the nose, so to speak. In other words, self-preservation kicked in, and so the woman is vindicated against her adversary.

“Now, what is this little metaphorical story, this *parabolas*, really about? We must bear in mind that the story has a few symbolic elements, but it involves an analogy. So, for instance, it would be a mistake to simply equate in all or most respects this judge with G-d, the judge of the world. G-d is not an unjust judge, and when his Son, the Son of Man returns, he will judge the world completely fairly and even with mercy. The point, however, is like the point of so many Jewish stories—if even this man, a bad judge, finally vindicates the old woman, then how much more will G-d, the real judge, do so for his people, who cry out to him both day and night?

“The story is a reassurance that G-d will vindicate his people at the appropriate time. But as the ending of the story asks, when the Son of Man comes, will he find us faithful? The question is not whether G-d will be faithful and keep his promises and vindicate his people; the question is, will we continue to have faith in G-d? Will we continue to pray to G-d? This little story could be seen as an exhortation to be persistent in praying and to never give up. Not because G-d is a reluctant answerer of prayer, but because G-d knows what timing is best. G-d even knows whether answering a prayer in the affirmative would be good for us or not. Sometimes no is the answer to prayer we need, though not usually the one we want.”

On this evening those gathered seemed to be in more of a reflective mood, and no questions were asked after Agabus offered his teaching. Instead, following a collection of funds—the so-called poor fund, especially for widows and orphans, but also for single folk like Miryam—there was some singing. One song in particular moved Miryam deeply. It was a call and response between the men on one

side of the peristyle and the women on the other:

The psalm, with its several verses sung slowly, resonated with the teaching of Agabus. Miryam's tears welled up and flowed down her cheeks as gathered voices filled the evening air. She felt like that widow in the story. How often had she cried out to G-d when she was lonely and alone. On this night G-d seemed to be speaking to her. But what was the message? Was it that G-d had heard her cry, that he had sent Jason and his family to be a comfort and a help in times of trouble? Perhaps.

Women

Out of the depths I cry to you
Lord, hear my voice
Let your ears be listening
to my cry for mercy

As worship concluded, people gathered around Agabus and Aristobolus, thanking them for the evening. Miryam noticed that Julius had been the first to thank Aristobolus and then made a quick retreat through the *tablinum* to the front of the villa. As Miryam approached Jason, she saw his excitement on his face: "It's been a good while since I shared in a good worship and fellowship time like that. What a blessing!"

"Yes it was," smiled Miryam, "but we need to light our lamps and head down the hill." After departing hugs of the host and hostess, Miryam and Jason began their descent, humming the psalm of ascent that they had just sung.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS



AS PLEASANT AS THE TIME HAD BEEN in Jericho, Levi felt it was time to move on to Capernaum. It was now the fourth day since the fall of Jerusalem. The mop-up operation would begin to sweep through the nearby villages and towns, and soon there would be troops in Jericho. Levi had heard that things were quieter now by the lake, more than anywhere else in or near Judea. He felt some urgency to get on with his own account of the life of Jesus. He was planning to seek out some of Jesus' followers on the northwest side of Kinneret Sea to learn more of Jesus' teachings, and he could already visualize an account that presented blocks of Jesus' teaching interspersed with narrative, an account a teacher like himself might use.

Levi was not the only one leaving Jericho. So were Joanna, Miryam, and Martha. The four would cross the Jordan together and head up the King's Highway, but the women were planning to veer off to Pella, while Levi would continue on and recross the river just south of the Kinneret.

Packing up did not take them very long. Having said their goodbyes to the household of Zaccheus and thanked them for their kind hospitality, the little party made their way down to the Jordan as dawn was breaking crimson over the eastern hills. They walked in silence, each with their own thoughts and anxieties about the future.

When they reached the river, they saw something unexpected. At first they thought it was just some observant Jews doing their morning ritual ablutions, but there were *mikva'ot* for that in Jericho.

But then Levi noticed that one person was immersing another in the river.

"Look!" he said. "Someone is being baptized!"

"They must be followers of Jesus!" Martha said. "Let's talk to

them.”

Mikveh

The Hebrew word *mikveh* refers to a collection of something, usually a collection or quantity of water. The purpose of a *mikveh* is ritual cleansing of the body, and in recent years more and more *mikva'ot* have been found at archaeological sites from all over Israel, showing just how observant many early Jews were. For example, they have been found in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Cana, and Qumran. Various regulations in Leviticus (see Lev 11:36) were taken to mean that once one became ritually unclean, a total immersion was required to remove such uncleanness. In the case of women, menstruation and childbirth were causes of uncleanness, and in the case of men, seminal emission in the night was a cause. Touching a corpse or an unclean or ill person, having an illness, or eating unclean food could make both men and women ritually unclean. The procedure to remedy this condition was simple. One entered a *mikveh* down one stairway into the ritual pool and then exited by a different one so that one did not recontaminate oneself. It was also possible to cleanse oneself in a larger body of water, such as the Jordan River. Some early Jews thought that a more profound uncleanness required a more profound cleansing in what was called “living water,” a spring or river where there was moving water.



Figure 10.1. Mikveh stairs at Qumran

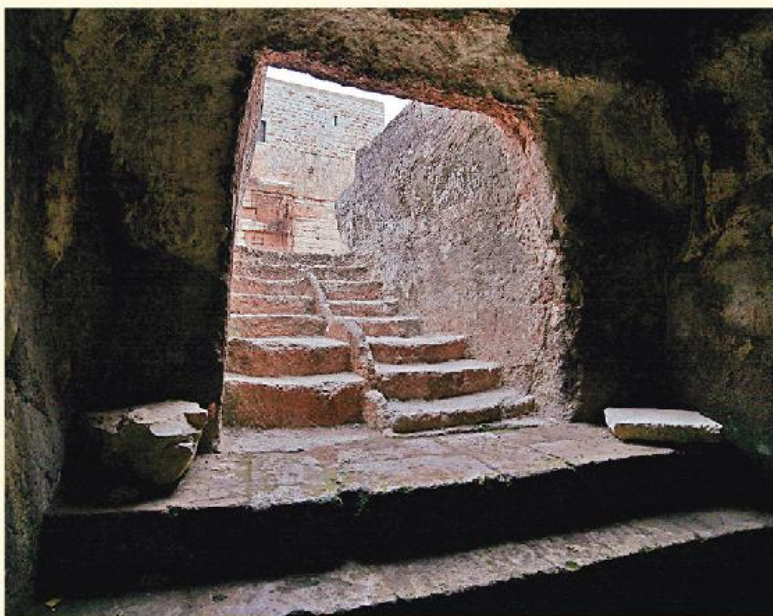


Figure 10.2. Mikveh with double stairs

As the two were coming up out of the river—talking excitedly to one another in Aramaic—Martha, who was never shy, approached them. “Are you followers of the Master?”

The taller man at first looked circumspect, but on seeing Martha’s eager face he softened and replied, “Yes, we are. We have come here for baptism because it must have been near here that some of the

baptisms of John took place.”

“Yes,” said Martha, “at Aenon, across the way, near the other side of the Jordan. But you are right, near here.”

“May I ask who you are?” said the taller man.

“I am Martha, one of the Master’s Judean disciples. Until now I lived in Bethany.”

With this the man lit up. “I am Johannan, a new follower of Jesus, and I have actually heard of you! I live near Jericho, and my friend here, Yehuda, has been a follower for more than ten years. He is from the desert near Masada. He has been instructing me in Jesus’ ways, telling me the stories of Jesus’ original disciples—both men and women. The Master was so radical in having women disciples!”

“You are right. Some got very upset with him for that,” Levi said.

“Including my former husband, Chuza,” added Joanna. “I traveled with the Master and the Twelve in Galilee and Judea, and there were many tongues wagging about this. Some suggested that Jesus was not a holy man after all, since none of the women who traveled with him were his relatives.”

As the three women and Levi left the baptismal party, their spirits rose and their hearts sang with joy. Girding up their clothing, they waded across the shallow river. In the spring after the winter torrent, it would have been difficult or impossible to cross, but now in later August, it was more like crossing a deep creek than a river. They emerged on the other side, wet to their thighs.

Turning north, they began their journey up the northernmost part of the King’s Highway. In fact, the road extended south all the way to the Red Sea, going through Petra in the territory of the Nabateans. From Zion, on a bright clear day, one could actually see a little of this remarkable city shining in the desert.

There were many travelers on the road, since it was the main north-south artery for trade and travel. The little band of four elderly people hardly drew any notice as they began to make their way north.

About an hour into the journey, as they were approaching an oasis, they encountered a shocking sight. About fifty yards off the road to right, the rotting corpse of a man hung on a cross. Carrion birds sat atop the crosspiece, scrabbling over the remaining flesh. Catching its foul, rotting odor, the women turned, covering their faces with their cloaks. The sight was a signature Roman statement, demonstrating the

fate of those who rebelled against them. The travelers did not speak as they passed it.

Reaching a little spring, they stopped to rest. The fresh spring water calmed their nerves and stomachs. But they were soon on their way again—for the way to Pella was long, and the road did not forgive those who lingered. They would move on to where Levi's road broke off toward Galilee, and there they would camp together for the night.

Levi was already thinking ahead. There was now no Herod ruling in Galilee. There was talk of a Roman legate coming to Tiberias and overseeing the region, and Levi feared that in fact Galilee would be incorporated into a Roman province, whether the province of Judea or Syria. Then there would be direct Roman rule in Galilee, as there had been in Judea. Where that would leave Jewish tax collectors like himself remained to be seen. Still, he trusted he could find a quiet place to live in Capernaum and, by minding his own business, avoid any trouble as he wrote his Jesus story.

The journey north of the oasis took three more hours. The elderly women, accustomed as they were to travel on foot, still found their limit at about fifteen miles a day before their sandaled feet grew sore. Laying out their thin sleeping mats at the little camping area near the crossroads, they took some food and water and settled in for the night. Sleep came with little difficulty, despite the occasional traffic of the road. The desert night canopy was lit with stars.

Levi's sleep came with a dream—a dream of a room full of scrolls. He was ushered into the room, frantically searching for a particular document. In his dream he searched for hours and hours without finding what he was looking for. He cried out, "Where are the words of my Master? Who has them?" A loud voice answered: "Go to the fisherman's house in Bethsaida, and you will find them."

But when Levi asked "Which fisherman's house?" there was only silence. And then suddenly, Levi was awake, staring up into the sky. The desert wind was blowing, and Levi shivered. He wrapped himself in his mantle, turned over, and slept fitfully until dawn.

JULIUS REPORTS BACK



THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN JULIUS and his superior, Gracchus, had become animated. Gracchus was the wealthy patron of many in Pella, including Julius. He had spent lavishly on the imperial cult temple in Pella, and he had helped with the renovations of the basilica there as well. He had bought votes for many candidates running for officers of the *demos* or *ekklesia*, and he had performed so many “liturgies,” or public works projects, that most citizens deemed him first man of Pella.

“My lord Gracchus,” said Julius, “we cannot simply do away with the Christ followers of this town. Many of them are influential citizens like Aristobolus. But I agree that this pernicious Eastern worship of some Jewish man named Jesus, apparently a man crucified by our own procurator in Judea, needs to be stopped. Not least because these people deny the existences of other gods, other lords.”

“And when they do that, they are also guilty of treason, of failing to honor the emperor, whose new temple I myself erected here!” said Gracchus angrily.

Julius tried not to show any nervousness. “But, my lord, many of these worshipers are exempt from worshiping the emperor because they are Jews. They honor him by praying for him, not to him.”

“Yes, but this can hardly be said of Aristobolus, who is a Greek, not Jewish at all.”

“Are you suggesting we have Aristobolus brought before the court? He has many friends here, as you know. That will not go down well.”

Demos

The word is the basis of the word *democratic* and was sometimes

used as an alternative term for the *ekklēsia*, the democratically elected assembly in Greece, though it could also be used to refer to a municipality in Attica in Greece. It also referred to the ordinary citizens of an ancient Greek city-state. Like most ancient Greek cities in the East that had been founded by or adopted by Alexander and his successors, Pella still had the form of Greek polity, but de facto the city was ruled by the wealthy, and particularly the Roman wealthy, though there would have been rich Greeks as well in Pella. Since Pella was part of the Decapolis, there were likely similarities in how the government worked in the ten cities, but none of them were immune to bribery and the buying of votes by the powerful and influential.

Gracchus thought for a minute, stroking his thin chin beard, and then said, “Perhaps not. Perhaps someone less well connected. Were there any slaves attending the worship event you went to?”

“Yes, my lord, there were. Mostly the household slaves of Aristobolus. But I did notice one rather pretty young slave who seemed to belong to a businessman named Hector. She spoke a prophecy that frankly made me shudder. It seemed as if she somehow knew my intentions for being at Aristobolus’s house.”

“Why not seize her, Julius, and suggest that she is a false medium or a prophetess? Why not accuse her of perpetrating a *superstitio*? That is a chargeable offense here.”¹

“Yes, that is a good idea,” Julius mused. “It surprised me, a slave speaking without being given permission by her master. This was another thing I did not like about the meeting. The dinner before the meeting—everyone got the same food, was treated the same. I even had to sit across from some old stinking Jew wearing tatters. It was revolting. Aristobolus didn’t seem in the least conscious that he was violating our code of hospitality.”

“All the more reason then to take action, to nip this upstart religion in the bud before it spreads some more.”

“Yes, Gracchus, but even this action will raise the ire of Aristobolus. After all, I was his guest at this meal.”

“Well, my friend, that’s just the price you will have to pay. After all, it is I and not Aristobolus who is your patron.”

“Yes, of course. I will begin to draw up the papers in the morning.”

“Good. I knew you were a sensible man.” Gracchus’s face calmed, and Julius felt his pulse slow down, though there was still faint stirring of unease in his belly.

THE TRAVELS AND TRAVAILS OF TORAH



JOSHUA HAD WAITED UNTIL an opportune moment to approach the centurion known as “the Hammer.” He was huge by any standards, a boulder of a man, his rippling biceps and thick legs evoking something chiseled out of granite. His real name was Quintus Favorinus, but no one but his superiors dared call him that. He had many virtues, at least when it came to warfare, but honesty and generosity were not among them. While Quintus himself could not be bought, a shrewd person might make a deal with him, as long as Quintus stood to profit considerably.

So Joshua approached Quintus quietly on the fifth day after the burning of the temple. Quintus was known to be in possession of a considerable amount of spoils from the temple treasury, not all of which he would be able to cart back to Roma with him. The ruins were still smoldering, and there was still much to do to put the province in order before Titus and his Roman legions could leave, taking Quintus with him as his standard bearer. He was the one who had been first over the wall into Jerusalem, and as such he had won the *corona muralis* from Titus, as well as the right to plant the Roman eagle in the temple’s holy place once it had been conquered.

Joshua was the antithesis of Quintus: tiny, frail, old, and in no way threatening. But Joshua was also clever, with a nimble and resourceful mind. From the second day after the disaster, Joshua had observed Quintus, putting his knowledge of both Greek and Latin to good use. Insinuating himself into the good graces of the centurion, he even suggested to him how best to pack some of the valuables he had taken from the temple. What Quintus did not know was that Joshua was a reformer—and one with a deep love for Torah. And now Joshua had a

very large purse of Tyrian shekels, the money used to pay the temple tax. Happily, it was valid currency anywhere, especially in the eastern half of the empire.¹

Corona Muralis

There were many Roman military decorations, but one of the most prestigious was the *corona muralis*, the award for extreme bravery. The award itself was a golden crown, or a smaller circle of gold, and it was intended to resemble a battlement or a city wall. It was bestowed on the first soldier who climbed the wall of a besieged city and was the first to place the standard of the attacking army on it (see Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Attici* 5.6.4; Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 26.48). In a deliberate parody, involving mock boasting, Paul talks about one of his “honors” being first down the wall in a basket when he left Damascus (2 Cor 11:32-33).

Walking into the Roman camp pitched in the temple’s Court of the Gentiles, where Quintus held sway, Joshua approached Quintus’s body slave, Loukas. Joshua asked to see “the great man.” Quintus was not yet deep in his cups, as it was only the third hour of the morning, and he was likely to be feeling quite sanguine and in command of things. Now, Joshua judged, was the propitious moment to approach the man.

Ushered into the makeshift tent of Quintus, Joshua bowed to the mighty warrior and said, “I see you have taken my advice about how to pack the scrolls so they will weather the sea travel.”

“Yes, I thank you for that.” He eyed Joshua warily. “Have you more free advice today?”

“No, my lord, I come with a proposition for you to your great advantage, if you are willing to listen. But this is for your ears only.”

Quintus waved his hand at Postumus, the cupbearer, to leave the tent. After all, what harm could a diminutive little Jew do to him? Postumus left without hesitation.

Reorganizing at Jamnia

Most scholars now doubt there was some sort of Council at Yavneh (Jamnia) that settled the issue of what should be in the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures. Still, there is little doubt that the famous teacher Johanan ben Zakkai relocated from Jerusalem to Yavneh not long before the destruction of Jerusalem and had a school of sorts there. It is also clear enough that the Jerusalem Council or Sanhedrin relocated there, of which our fictional character Joshua is a member. Some such development, in any case, has to account for the deliberate focusing on the Hebrew text of the Torah, and in due course the rejection of the LXX, as well as the focus on some interesting Greek books such as Wisdom of Solomon and some of the Maccabean literature, even to the point of considering such documents sacred texts. Early Judaism, having lost two of the famous Ts—temple and territory—now concentrated on the third T, Torah, and the preservation of its Hebrew Scriptures and their study in detail, leading to the production of the Mishnah, which may have begun to be collected at Yavneh. Later, of course, there were the Talmuds as well. The only vibrant and growing Jewish groups that really survived the holocaust of AD 70 were the Pharisees and the Jewish followers of Jesus. The Qumran community seems to have been laid waste by AD 72 by Flavius Silva, and the Sadducees, the landed gentry of Jerusalem, had been disenfranchised altogether. Then too, while the followers of John the Baptizer still existed in the mid-first century (see Acts 19), we do not seem to have any record of their existence in the late first century. What really finished off any remaining Zealot tendencies was the crushing of the Bar Kokhba revolt in the early second century, which led to Jerusalem becoming a pagan city, Aelia Capitolina. It is the image of this Roman city that we see in the famous Madaba map mosaic in the floor of the sixth-century St. George's church, only eighteen miles east of the Dead Sea in Jordan.



Figure 12.1. Madaba map mosaic in the Church of Saint George, Madaba, Jordan

“I notice that you have one oversized scroll in your collection there, surely too large to easily survive even for a short while on the journey you are about to take. I am here to offer you a generous amount to take it off your hands.”

Quintus smiled. “And what figure did you have in mind?”

“How does fifty Tyrian shekels sound to you?”

Scratching his chin and cocking his head to one side, as if thinking, he said, “I believe you can do better than that, surely. That is only the wages of a centurion for a year, and I am looking to retire rich someday. Make me an offer I am less likely to refuse.”

Joshua had anticipated this. He had in fact brought with him 150 shekels, but he was hoping not to have to spend them all in this risky business. Looking downcast, Joshua said, “My lord, as you know, I am but a simple priest, and you have taken the booty of the temple treasury. Have I not dealt fairly and helpfully with you until now? Suppose I upped the offer to seventy-five shekels. This is a truly generous offer for a scroll written in Hebrew that is of no possible use to you and frankly would not have much resale value in Roma.”

Quintus sat up, straightened his toga, and said, “Make it one hundred shekels and we have a deal. But you must take away the scroll at once. We need to be done with this before the accounting officers get here to take inventory of what we have taken.”

Looking as pitiful as he dared, Joshua sighed and replied, "All right. I guess I will just have to find some other means of supporting my family in the coming months. But I will not have another chance to purchase that scroll, so you win!" Joshua knew it was important that Quintus thought he got the better end of the bargain.

Joshua had put one hundred shekels in one bag hidden under his cloak and the other fifty in a separate bag, so he did not have to show Quintus how much he really had. Quintus stood up, took the bag of silver, and rummaged through a pile of things behind his chair until he came to the large leather container with the Torah scroll in it. He handed it to Joshua with a parting word: "You people used to strike harder bargains than that, but I guess you know when you are beaten."

Joshua smiled wanly and said, "You have said it." Resisting the impulse to hurry out, he walked slowly down and out of the Court of the Gentiles, out the Damascus Gate, where his son Jacob, a young man of fifteen, was waiting for him.

"Where to now, Father? Where shall we go?"

"Up north, to Yavneh. We must reorganize and start afresh, and we will meet other priests and rabbis there. As long as we still have Torah and G-d still is our G-d, we are not beaten just yet."

THE END OF LEVI



LEVI ROSE WITH THE FIRST glow of dawn on the fifth day after the fall of Jerusalem. With sadness he said his goodbyes to the three women, knowing that he might never see them again. Their company and living faith had been an encouragement to him—not to mention his keen interest in their eyewitness testimony and perspective on events in Jesus’ ministry. He had taken care to explore their memories over the past few days, writing notes and turning their testimonies over in his mind.

Levi was puzzled by the reference in his dream to the fisherman’s house in Bethsaida. Peter’s house in Bethsaida had long since been left behind by that family. Perhaps Philip’s family was meant?¹ Anyway, Levi would have some detective work to do when he got to Capernaum. And he must track down the collection of Jesus’ sayings in Aramaic that had reportedly been made in the last few decades in that area. Levi was also eager to go to Nazareth and see whether any family traditions were still to be found there.

Like many Jews, Levi had more than one name. When he had been a tax collector in Capernaum, many years prior, he had used the name Levi. And so too when he went to Jerusalem and served as a priestly scribe in the temple. But Levi was not, in fact, his proper name—it was a truncated title of his lineage, a Levite of that priestly tribe. Returning now to Capernaum, he did not want any graybeards with long memories recognizing who he was and causing trouble. So he planned to use only his proper name, Mattheos, in Capernaum. Fortunately for him, over the course of forty years, he had lost enough hair on his head and grown enough hair on his face to not be instantly recognizable, even by those who had previously known and despised him as a tax collector in Capernaum. He was hoping and trusting that

the Jewish followers of Jesus would embrace him—not least because he brought with him good news, the account written down by Mark, by way of Peter, and also the letter of Paul to the Romans, which they surely had not previously heard.

Levi was tired, and apprehensive of what was next. More than anything, he was lonely. He had lost his temple, and his friends and fellow priests had all gone their separate ways in the last weeks and months. Levi had never married. He sometimes wondered how Jesus must have felt when his family did not understand him; he too had gained no family by marriage.

We die alone for sure, but I also have lived alone all these years, thought Levi, feeling sorry for himself. Who would look after him if he became feeble or infirm? He needed to get established and situated in Capernaum, and to make some friends. Above all, he must get busy writing down his account of Jesus' life and ministry. This would be his legacy. Mark's account, in his mind, was too brief, said nothing about Jesus' heredity or birth, and had far too few of Jesus' famous teachings in it. It also, strangely, didn't say enough about Peter himself, even though Levi knew Mark's source had chiefly been Peter's own teachings about Jesus. Of one thing he was sure—the movement of Christ-followers needed to write down its heritage, and in Greek, the lingua franca of the empire. The world needed to know about the Master. Mattheos was under no delusions about providing the definitive—much less the exhaustive—account. But he was determined to provide a faithful account, and a fuller one than Mark had offered.

As he came to the southern end of the sea called Kinneret, he once more waded across the Jordan, this time westward. Things were strangely quiet here at midday. Holding his leather satchel with his precious scrolls over his head, Mattheos reached the other side and clambered slowly up the bank. The effort made him realize how bone-tired he really was. He had been on the go, first fleeing to Jericho, then up the King's Highway, and now back into Galilee. And his final days in Jerusalem had been stressful as well. Things were quiet at this ford of the Jordan.

“Stop right there!” The sharp command was spoken in Greek.

Mattheos groaned to himself. He had not thought that a group of Roman auxiliaries might be waiting in the grove of trees bordering the

river. And here was a commander on a large black horse—looking for runaway bandits, thieves, and Zealots, no doubt.

“Who are you? Identify yourself!”

Mattheos, rummaging through his satchel, produced the seal that had been given to him by Herod Antipas himself. “I have been a tax collector for Herod here in Galilee, at Capernaum. Here is my seal of office. In more recent years I have served as a scribe in Jerusalem, helping with the collection of taxes for Caesar and the temple there. After the recent events in Jerusalem, there was no more work for me there. So I have come home. I am bone-weary and am hoping to settle down peacefully now that the *Pax Romana* is descending on this region.”

Mattheos was rather proud of the little speech he had mustered up on the spur of the moment, and when the commander demanded to see the seal, he willingly handed it over. “Show me what is in your bag,” demanded the commander.

Knowing that even a moment’s hesitation could be taken as a sign of having something to hide, Mattheos opened his satchel and said, “See my lord, just the tools of my trade, some old scrolls, and my stylus and ink, and alas, no money, honestly. If you are looking for a bandit and not a poor old scribe and tax collector, it’s not me you are looking for.”

This produced a belly laugh from the commander. “I assure you, we are not lurking in those trees waiting to nab your sort!” He added, “You should check in with the legate when he shows up in Tiberias, as Galilee will no longer have need of any Jewish ruler. It will be part of a Roman province going forward.”

“I will,” said Mattheos, with no trace of irony. Then, seeing an opportunity to further improve his standing with the commander, he went on. “Actually, I am relieved to hear this. The Herods were a corrupt lot, and if you ask my opinion, not really very faithful to Roma and the emperor, so I take this as welcome news. As long as we ordinary Jews are left alone and allowed to practice our religion in Galilee, I doubt there will be more trouble. You’ve no doubt rounded up most of the hotheads by now or will soon do so.”

“Wise words,” said the commander, “words that should keep you alive, old man. *Vale!*” He tossed the seal back to Mattheos, who trundled off, heading north up the path toward Tiberias and then

Capernaum.

Five minutes later shock set in, and Mattheos's legs turned wobbly. Sitting down, he wiped his brow with his sleeve. "That was close. Thank you, Lord, for deliverance. And I must ever remember—Levi is no more. Only Mattheos now and henceforth."

UNCERTAIN PATHS



MARTHA WAS GROWING WEARY and peckish after another day of nonstop walking and talking. The Jordan was long sunk over the horizon, and Pella drew closer and closer. But where would the three of them stay when they arrived? They had no plan. Being a talkative person, Martha vocalized their worries as she walked. Finally, Joanna and Miryam had had enough of it.

“Let’s change the subject, shall we, sister? Maybe we will open an inn in Pella and call it ‘The Three Sisters,’” joked Miryam.

“Right,” said Martha, snorting, “I can see it now. Greeks and Romans lining up for Jewish food prepared according to Leviticus. We could also put up a sign out front—baths for the ritually unclean. That ought to attract customers.”

“Let’s really change the subject,” said Joanna. “Let me tell you about when I first saw the risen Jesus. Now that’s a subject worth dwelling on.”

“Oh, yes,” said Miryam eagerly, “Please tell us about that. We were in Bethany, in shock and mourning, and only heard about it much later.”

“It was very dark and chilly when I went with Miryam of Migdal and Salome to Jesus’ tomb to anoint his body and change the linen wrapping. We were in such shock, so numb, that none of us really considered how exactly we were going to manage to roll the stone back from the entranceway of the tomb. And there were the soldiers as well. But we were determined to try.

“When we came around the corner in the garden where the tomb was, we could see that the stone had already been rolled back. Immediately I thought it must be grave robbers.



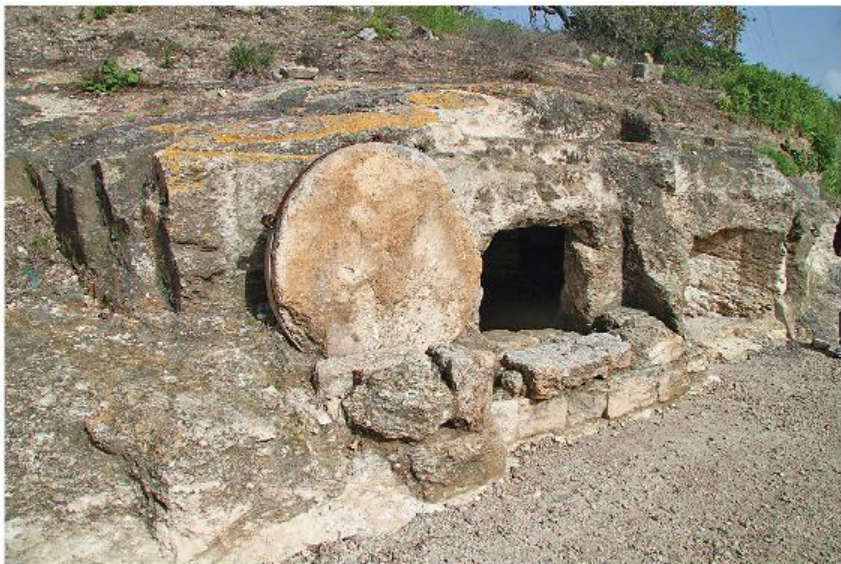


Figure 14.1. First-century tomb with stone

“Miryam, however, had the notion that Jesus’ body had been moved by the gardener, though why he would have done so was beyond me. We approached the tomb and looked in. And there, inside, were what looked like two young men, only they seemed to glow, and they were sitting at either end of the stone slab where Jesus’ body had been laid.

“They said, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen! Go tell the disciples.’”

Joanna took a deep breath. “Panic replaced our grief. We fled, leaving the linens and the oils we had brought, and ran to tell the Eleven, who were hiding in the upper room. It struck me later was that there were two of these heavenly messengers, as if to confirm the truth by the testimony of two witnesses.

A Look at Grave Robbers

A famous inscription from the time of Claudius or Nero was found in Nazareth in the late nineteenth century. It ended up in a French museum. Here is the inscription itself.

As for the translation, the following gives the literal rendering:

EDICT OF CAESAR

2. It is my decision [concerning] graves and tombs—whoever has made
3. them for the religious observances of parents, or children, or household
4. members—that these remain undisturbed forever. But if anyone legally
5. charges that another person has destroyed, or has in any manner extracted
6. those who have been buried, or has moved with wicked intent those who
7. have been buried to other places, committing a crime against them, or has
8. moved sepulcher-sealing stones, against such a person I order that a
9. judicial tribunal be created, just as [is done] concerning the gods in
10. human religious observances, even more so will it be obligatory to treat
11. with honor those who have been entombed. You are absolutely not to
12. allow anyone to move [those who have been entombed]. But if
13. [someone does], I wish that [violator] to suffer capital punishment under
14. the title of tomb-breaker.

The inscription itself assumes that there were problems with the moving of corpses and the disturbing of tombs, presumably not just in Nazareth, a small village, but elsewhere. Of course, there are famous stories and evidence of grave robbing on a spectacular scale in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. What makes the modern finding of the Tomb of King Tutankhamen so spectacular is that most of the other tombs in that valley had long since been plundered and the objects sold. From a Roman point of view, grave robbing was a religious offense against the gods, but this is the only known evidence that grave robbing might in fact have warranted capital punishment.



Figure 14.2. Inscription found in Nazareth of an edict by Emperor Claudius prohibiting grave robbing

Some have suggested that this inscription is actually a warning to Christians, who were accused of stealing the body of Jesus in the first place. But there are problems with that notion: (1) The inscription does not date to the time of Tiberius, and (2) Christians were not especially singled out in the inscription nor noted during the first century for grave robbing (despite the claims of those who would see the Talpiot tomb as the place where Jesus' body was re-interred after it was pilfered from Joseph of Arimathea's tomb). But note, too, the reference to the sealing of tombs in Israel, also found in regard to Jesus' tomb in Matthew 27:65-66.

“We arrived at the upper room, and after knocking in the right pattern, we were let in. The men were in no mind to receive our story and immediately dismissed it as women’s fantasies. Even those who knew us well did not trust our testimony. But Peter and the Beloved Disciple, your own brother, went and found things just as we had said. But they did not see the angels, and they left the tomb more confused than we were. When we got back to the tomb, Miryam broke down and started crying. She was absolutely inconsolable. Just then, a hooded figure appeared at some distance from the tomb. All of a

sudden he said ‘Miryam,’ in just the tone of voice the Master always used with her. She fell at Jesus’ feet, bowing down. We followed her lead, stunned to see the Master alive again, and not just as a spirit, but in the flesh, well and healthy.

“Jesus told us to go and tell the disciples we had seen our risen Master. We were to tell them Jesus would soon be returning to the Father. Whether they believed us or not, we were determined to do as Jesus said. Words cannot describe our joy—that he was back from the grave!” Joanna felt a swell of hope arise in her even as she told the tale. “There were of course many other appearances of Jesus to his disciples. Sometimes he appeared to individuals, like Jesus’ brother Jacob, or Peter, or even Saul of Tarsus, and sometimes to whole groups of us, in Jerusalem, in Judea, and later even in Galilee.

“It was at one of those appearances in Jerusalem that I met my husband, Andronicus. As you know, my first husband, Chuza, cared more about his job and prestige as Herod’s estate manager than he cared about me. When I shamed him by becoming a regular traveling follower and supporter of the Master, he gave me a writ of divorce. Herod Antipas didn’t want any of his staff involved in that, so Chuza had to choose. I do not blame him. And in effect he set me free. But I was able to take my dowry with me, since it was not a case of being accused of adultery or anything of that sort. This made it possible for me to become a full-time follower of Jesus, even traveling to Jerusalem with him. Eventually Andronicus and I were both commissioned as proper missionaries, or apostles, and we ended up assisting Paul. Not all who saw the risen Jesus became such missionaries or apostles, but we did. I have no regrets about how I have spent the last forty years in service to our Savior. And even now, as I am old, I look forward to what is next—without anxiety and with hope.”

Martha had remained silent, though she understood that Joanna’s last remark was gently meant for her. And of course Joanna was right. Being right, however, didn’t settle how the three would begin a new life, let alone survive in a Roman city. But they knew there were other Christians in Pella who might help.

THE HOUSE OF THE FISHERMAN



LATE ON THE FIFTH DAY after the fall of Jerusalem, Mattheos settled into a fisherman's little house near the synagogue in Capernaum. He had no trouble convincing the fisherman to rent the house to him, at least until he could manage to acquire one of his own. The fisherman needed money desperately. The war had been bad for the lakeside economy and that of Galilee more broadly, and business had suffered. Mattheos had determined to try to find the house he saw in his dream by climbing up the hill to old Bethsaida the next morning. He was tired, but also anxious to get to work on his narrative of the life of Jesus. Eventually he would need to visit Nazareth as well, in search of more source material.

At dawn of the sixth day after the destruction of the temple, Mattheos was up early, watching the sun rise over the eastern rim of the sea. In the foreground, fishermen were already casting their nets on the water. After a little bread with some wine and figs, Mattheos began the four-mile walk to the center of Bethsaida. He would ask for the big house of the fisherman.

Mattheos's memories of Bethsaida were clouded by the decades. Though he recalled the long climb up the hill to reach the little village, its wearisome length had receded from memory. Of course, he had not forgotten that it was a border town, where toll takers collected from merchants and travelers crossing into Galilee. And he recalled the antiquity of the village, stretching back many centuries. But he did not know whether there were still Christ followers in this town, and he was apprehensive about poking around and inquiring after them. Years ago there had been tensions in these little fishing villages about Jesus' disciples. And he wondered whether there was a Roman presence in the town—something he did not relish

encountering again.



Figure 15.1. Map of Galilee in New Testament times

It was a windless morning, and the sun seemed relentless as Mattheos climbed up the hill. Sweat beaded and streamed from his brow, and he was tempted to find a place to rest for a while, but he was convinced that his dream and its house were significant, given to him as guidance. The image of the house was clear enough, and he was intent on finding it.



Figure 15.2. Fishermen mending their nets

Starting on the side of the village closest to Capernaum, though, nothing seemed to match up, and he began to feel discouraged. Town folk were coming and going as he wandered—women returning home from the springs with water jars on their heads, men returning from a night of fishing. He could smell the fresh fish. Two fishermen with their little weighted nets passed him as he continued on. And as it goes in a small village, people looked at Mattheos, trying to place him in their mental map of village life and citizenry.

Finally, coming almost to the end of the little village, Mattheos saw a house with a big courtyard and a separate kitchen at the back of the property. There was something of a villa—by village standards—on the right side of the courtyard. Beckoning to a boy running by, he asked, “What is this house?”

“The house of the fisherman,” the boy replied, pointing to nets drying in the courtyard, and then dashed away.

“Perhaps I have finally arrived,” said Mattheos to himself. Mustering his courage, he walked up and gave a vigorous knock on the door. Soon enough a young woman with a head covering opened the door.

“*Shalom*,” Mattheos said. “May I ask whose house this is, and is the master at home?”

The girl turned stern and said, "If you are selling something, we don't want any. And if you are a tax collector, we have already paid!"

"No," said Mattheos chuckling at how the girl had gotten it half-right, "I am not a peddler. I am looking for an old friend."

The girl softened a little and opened the door more widely with the words, "This is the household of Philip. His sons and wives live here now."

"Philip! Excellent. Might I speak with one of the men of the house?"

As she turned away from the door, she called, "Jacob, someone here at the door is wishing to speak to you."

"Ask him to come in," said a muffled voice from deeper in the house.

Mattheos stepped into a large family room. It was a scene of domestic activity—someone cooking to his left, and to his right an older woman and two younger ones sewing. But most promising of all, across the room a man—a literate man!—was sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of a small writing table with a scroll.

"Whom do we have the honor of meeting?" asked the man.

"My name is Mattheos, and I was a friend of a Philip who once lived in this village. Was this his home?"

The old woman in the corner looked up from her sewing. She abruptly stood up and came close, inspecting his face.

"Would you be *the* Mattheos, one of the Twelve?"

"One and the same!" beamed Mattheos. "I am the man."

At once the woman clapped her hands, and an attendant came and offered to wash and anoint his feet and even his scalp. Mattheos was not about to turn down this hospitable gesture. The younger man sitting at the desk stood up and came and embraced Mattheos after his anointing. "*Shalom alechem*," he said.

"And on your house and family as well," Mattheos replied.

"So you knew my father?"

"I did indeed! But it was long ago, forty years or more. A whole generation in the past. What happened to the household of Peter and Andrew?"

"Andrew died, and as you may know, Simeon was martyred in Roma, God rest his soul. What is left of Simeon's family resides in Capernaum in the so-called house of Peter, where we meet to worship.

I am Jacob, Philip's eldest son."

Mattheos briefly thought of indulging his curiosity and asking for more details on all of these things, but instead he said, "Jacob, I would like to hear more of your story. But right now I am on a quest to find any written collections of the traditions and sayings about the Master. You wouldn't know where I might find such things, would you?"

"I do indeed," Jacob said, smiling. "G-d has guided you to the right place. But we must first break bread together. Please sit on the mat here and tell me how you came to find me. Weren't you in Jerusalem with most of the other disciples?"

Mattheos accepted a bowl from the older woman who had recognized him. "What brought me here is a long story. But yes, I was in Jerusalem. But Jerusalem, including the temple, is no more."

What's in a Name? *Petros*

Petros in Greek, or *Cephas* in Aramaic (meaning "rock" in either language) was simply the nickname Jesus gave a man named Simeon, which is the Hebrew form of the Greek name Simon. It is interesting that Simon Peter is called by his Hebrew name, Simeon, by the brother of Jesus in Acts 15:13, and this is also used in 2 Peter 1:1. If Mattheos indeed spoke Aramaic, he would have used the Aramaic or Hebrew form of the man's name.

Jacob's face fell, and he put down his bread. "We had heard of this, but you are the first one to confirm it in person. Were you there when the temple was destroyed?"

"Yes," said Mattheos, his throat tightening. "Yes, I was there. As Jeremiah said: 'It is a desolate waste, without people or animals. Yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted, inhabited by neither people nor animals, there will be heard once more the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were before, says the Lord.'

"I cling to that hope now, but realistically, it does not seem likely

things will be restored any time soon.”

“Perhaps not until the Restorer returns, once and for all,” Jacob said.

“Perhaps you are right,” said Mattheos. “But let us talk now of happier things.”

ANOTHER JOURNEY BEGINS



JULIUS WAS DIMINUTIVE IN STATURE, but in court he was an intimidating figure. On this morning he was dealing with some petty theft complaints made by this “famous” person or that “honorable” patron. Nothing bored or irritated him more. And he did not suffer fools gladly. In fact, his mind was entirely elsewhere: on how he might take into custody the slave prophetess. He had already sent his personal bodyguard, the former chariot racer Hannibal (in the arena he was called Hannibal the Horrible) to take her captive. His pulse quickened as he thought of what measures he might take to extract information from her.



The slave woman, however, whose name was Xanthia, had had a premonition of what was to come. And when she told Hector, her master, that God had told her in prayer that she needed to leave town for a while, Hector did not argue with her and even sent with her his estate agent, Alexander. Hector owned a spice shop in Pella and was sending Alexander to Petra to do business with the spice merchants there.

Now handing Alexander a bag of silver, Hector warned him, “Guard this with your life. Either you or Xanthia must hide this inside your garments, not in your bags, where it could be pilfered at night while you sleep! Remember, body contact! Keep it on your person at all times. When you get to Nabatea, you may have to pay a toll at the border. That’s just the price of doing business.” He hesitated. “It is not proper for you to travel together, as an unmarried man and woman . . . but this seems the safest choice at the moment. I cannot spare

anyone else.

Ancient Laundries

The task of cleaning clothes in antiquity, especially fine clothes, was no less time consuming than it is today. Often such cleaning took place in the home, and the finer homes would have had their own “cleaning ladies” to accomplish the malodorous task—malodorous because the way that white togas were bleached back to pure white was by soaking them in urine. There were also public laundromats of a sort in antiquity, where there was a large marble vat to soak the clothes in the urine; for the right price, you could get most anything cleaned. The problem, of course, with using urine as bleach was that if there was any sort of color in a cloak or toga or tunic, any sort of filigree border or the like, it would be bleached to a very bland color as well, though there were apparently some techniques in antiquity to make fabric color-fast. This seems to have been the case when it came to the dye extracted from the murex shell, the so-called royal purple, which was in a sense trademarked by the emperor, in this case Vespasian. Only his agents were allowed to make garments with that dye.

Certain regions were famous for making long-lasting garments with certain colorful dyes, for example the area in Turkey known as Lydia. There is the famous story in Acts 16:11-15 about Paul meeting a woman from Thyatira (at the height of the Lydian kingdom a village in that kingdom, but in Paul’s day part of the province of Asia). We cannot be sure whether Lydia is a personal name (a woman named for the ancient region) or simply a descriptor, “the Lydian”; the Greek favors the former option. In any case, she seems to be a high-status woman with a home and servants of her own, licensed to make royal purple cloth—a trade she presumably learned in her home region, though when Paul met her she resided in Philippi, a Roman-colony city in northern Greece.

While making, dyeing, and cleaning clothes could be three separate professions, in practice, at least, the first and the third

were regularly part of women's work in the home. Dyeing could be trickier and was often left to professionals like Lydia. In any case, it would not be out of the ordinary at all for Hector to have his own cleaning facility and workers in his own home, if he was well-to-do.

“Now, go quickly! Out the back way, through the vineyard, and then down around the city perimeter to the road that leads to the King's Highway, and head south. This journey will take some time, perhaps weeks, if you drive hard bargains with those spice merchants. As you well know, they are very shrewd. As I always say, ‘Walk away thrice or you'll not get the spice at your price!’ Ah, well. Alexander, you know how to manage this. Farewell!”

With that, Alexander and Xanthia were off, through the peristyle garden and out the back way through the vineyards and onto the road. Hector did not figure to see them again for a good while. All the better. At least they would be safe.

Scarcely twenty minutes later there was a deafening pounding on his door.

Opening the door, Hector—a small Greek man with curly dark-brown hair—was looking directly at the midsection of a colossus. He looked up into the face of the man, a scarred visage that spoke volumes.

Holding out a writ, the man said in a deep voice, “I am here on official business from Julius, the judge. We have reason to believe a young slave woman of yours has made treasonous remarks, and we have come to take her in for questioning and possible trial.”

“In the first place,” said Hector, stretching to his full stature, “by Greek or Roman law, slaves are property, not persons. They cannot be tried as persons. So I could reject this summons as inappropriate on that ground alone. However, as it happens, she is no longer here. She has left on a long journey to Nabatea, and who knows whether she will ever come back. The roads are full of thieves and refugees from the war in Judea, not to mention soldiers. So she is not now nor shall she be available to Judge Julius any time soon, if ever.”

Hannibal was undaunted. “I have authority to search your house and see where this scoundrel woman is hiding.”

Hector smiled and said, “As you wish. I have nothing to hide, and

certainly she is not here.”

Hannibal took the invitation and began rummaging through Hector’s house like a bull set loose in a villa. He turned over couches, peered into closets and bedrooms, stomped through the wine cellar, sniffed in the laundry area—but only briefly, since the smell of urine, used for bleaching, was overwhelming—and then inspected the vineyards. His search took more than an hour, but he turned up nothing that looked even remotely like a young female slave.

Hannibal might not have been the brightest brand in the fireplace, but he knew when to give up. Finally he stomped back to the *tablinum*, where Hector was sitting, dealing with his day’s work. “I find nothing. But if and when this woman returns, I will be back. Judge Julius does not give up easily, I promise you.”

“Very well,” said Hector. “Your master should have known better than to try and arrest a slave and treat them as a person without involving me. In the future, he will have to deal with me directly, since Xanthia is my property. But as I say, who knows whether she will return at all.” With this Hector stood and escorted Hannibal to the door.

Stadion

This basic Greek unit of measure is said by Herodotus to amount to six hundred feet (157 meters), though in an Olympic stadium it was more like 176 meters. Races in such arenas were measured by how many *stadion* they were rather than by yards or meters. The Latinized form of this Greek word is *stadium*, from which the English word comes. The plural would be either *stadii* or *stadia*.

“Vale,” said Hector, raising his hand as Hannibal started out the door.

Turning back, Hannibal remarked, “Don’t be surprised if you see me again. Next time I shall not be so friendly.”

Once Hannibal was out of sight, Hector summoned his chief messenger among the slaves and said, “Go down into town and pay a visit to Zeno the lawyer. Tell him what just transpired, and tell him to be prepared to file a libel suit if necessary, due to a false claim against

me or my slave. Tell him I will come and lunch with him and explain in full, but for now tell him to explore the legal options carefully. Julius must not be allowed to run roughshod over ancient Greek law. This town is not a Roman colony city, and it is not run, at least according to tradition, on the basis of Roman law.”

As the slave departed, a smile came across Hector’s face. He thought to himself, One can’t be too careful these days. Give the Romans a stadion, and they take ten. Xanthia was right to warn us about a wolf among the sheep. I must tell Aristobolus to never invite that little sneak Julius to our worship again.

OF SPICES AND SNAKES



THE JOURNEY FROM PELLA TO PETRA was long, hot, and arduous. Xanthia and Alexander had traveled already for three days, and still the landscape, apart from the occasional oasis, was desert. The rugged rose-colored horizon ahead seemed to extend farther than the parched and rock-strewn horizon sinking behind them.



Figure 17.1. The desert approaching Petra

Traveling without a beast of burden, Alexander and Xanthia worked their way from oasis to oasis, spring to spring, heading south. There were a number of merchants on camels heading north, often bearing spices. The demand for spices ranged from cumin for cooking to myrrh for burials, and there were incenses for ceremonies,

especially religious and royal ones. No wonder this highway was sometimes called the Spice Road.

What's in a Name: Nabatea or Arabia?

Nabatea had been called such for many generations by the first century. In the time of Trajan it became part of a Roman province. Jews often called the area by its ancient name, Arabia. Greeks called it Nabatea because of their historical alliances in the Decapolis with the Nabateans and their various rulers named Aretas, before the Romans swept through the region.

It was evening when Alexander and Xanthia finally arrived at Petra. They approached through the narrow, weather-worn rock passages that led to the heart of Petra. These looked like they had been shaped by giant Nabatean artists, and Xanthia kept stopping, gazing up and around to marvel at their contours and grandeur. Winding their way through the narrow corridors of sculpted rock, she and Alexander entered the unique city of stone. Following a glow and a harmonic swell of voices, they soon broke into what appeared to be a religious ceremony in front of a pillared building carved out of the face of a cliff. The scene was extraordinary, unlike anything they had encountered before.

King Aretas

King Aretas IV was the king of Nabatea, including Petra, from AD 9 to circa AD 40, and after AD 37 he was apparently king of Damascus as well (thanks to a grant from Caligula). During this time Paul ran afoul of Aretas, presumably because of his preaching in Petra. There seems to have been a warrant put out for Paul on these grounds, hence the biblical story about the ethnarch of Aretas being after Paul when he was in Damascus (cf. Gal 1:17; 2 Cor 11:32-33; Acts 9:23-25).

The Nabatean kingdom continued to exist until the time of

Trajan, when it was “pacified” and incorporated into a Roman province, properly speaking. Until that time, however, Rome had had a series of alliances with the Nabateans, and the Nabateans had helped the Romans against the Jews at several points in the periods between 200 BC and AD 100. The Nabateans themselves seem to have originated as Bedouins in the deserts of southern Arabia, down toward the Red Sea, but they had taken over parts of the Edomite kingdoms when the Edomites had become weak, including capturing the spectacular “rose city” called Petra. The Nabateans worshiped their own gods and do not seem to have been much affected by Alexander’s Hellenization of the region. They were traders and had set up a series of oases, with farming at each one, that supported their own traders as they went north on the king’s highway, to sell spices and other goods, or south in Arabia, to collect the spices and goods. It is not entirely clear which Nabatean was ruling in the late first century AD before the efforts of Trajan to fully incorporate Nabatea into the empire.

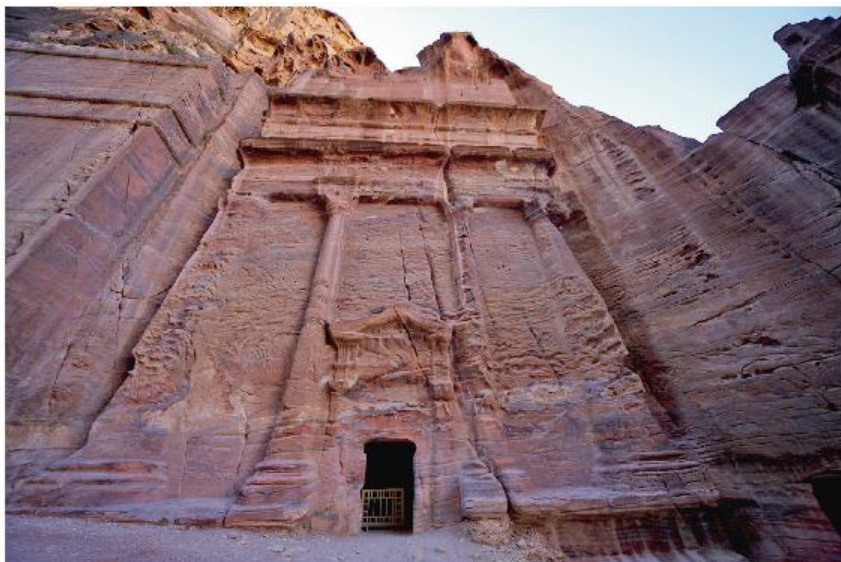
Aretas IV’s daughter, Phasaelis, had married Herod Antipas, but Herod divorced her in order to marry his brother Philip’s wife, Herodias, thus shaming both his own brother and King Aretas. Aretas did not take kindly to this snub, and in fact Phasaelis had fled to her father when she learned in advance that Herod Antipas was planning to jilt her. So Aretas IV invaded part of Herod’s border territory and exacted his revenge by defeating Herod’s army (in part because some of Herod’s army actually deserted him and joined the other side) and taking some of his territory. Josephus tells us that even some early Jews attributed this defeat to Herod Antipas’s beheading of John the Baptizer (*Ant.* 18.109-118). Herod appealed to Caesar for help, but nothing came of it, since the emperor died before Vitellius the governor of Syria ever got to Nabatea to punish Aretas.

A thousand lamps dappled the ground with light in front of a red-stone building chiseled from a cliff—they would learn it was the sanctuary—and from the surrounding crowd there rose a singing the likes of which Xanthia had never heard. The Nabatean language may have been foreign, but the spirit of the singing, exuberant and layered

in its harmonies, moved her. She and Alexander stopped to take in the scene. The ceremony was an enduring remnant of an ancient culture, enshrined in a language and religion that bore no resemblance to anything Xanthia had known: exotic, fascinating, captivating. But Alexander was less enthralled, and in due course he nudged her, whispering that they needed to move along and get settled for the night.



Figure 17.2. Cliffs at Petra



Xanthia pulled her gaze away from the scene and smiled up at him, taking his hand. It felt strange to be able to give in to her desire to touch him—their slow-burning romance of the past several months had been conducted in glances, in whispers, in small tokens left for the other, and then, having found one rare moment of privacy, in a brief, sweet embrace and a heartfelt pledge from Alexander to wed her as soon as they were both manumitted, as Hector had told them he planned to do. Even amid the fear that had filled her at the notion of this unexpected journey, she had had to bite her lip to keep from smiling when Hector had called Alexander and told him to accompany her. When they finally were alone, though, the strangeness of it had overwhelmed her, and Alexander seemed to feel the same way. They had spoken only when necessary during their journey thus far, exchanging shy smiles from time to time. Now, though, in the presence of their breathtaking surroundings and the beautiful singing, which gave her chills, she had lost her shyness and felt him relax a bit as well as they moved on.

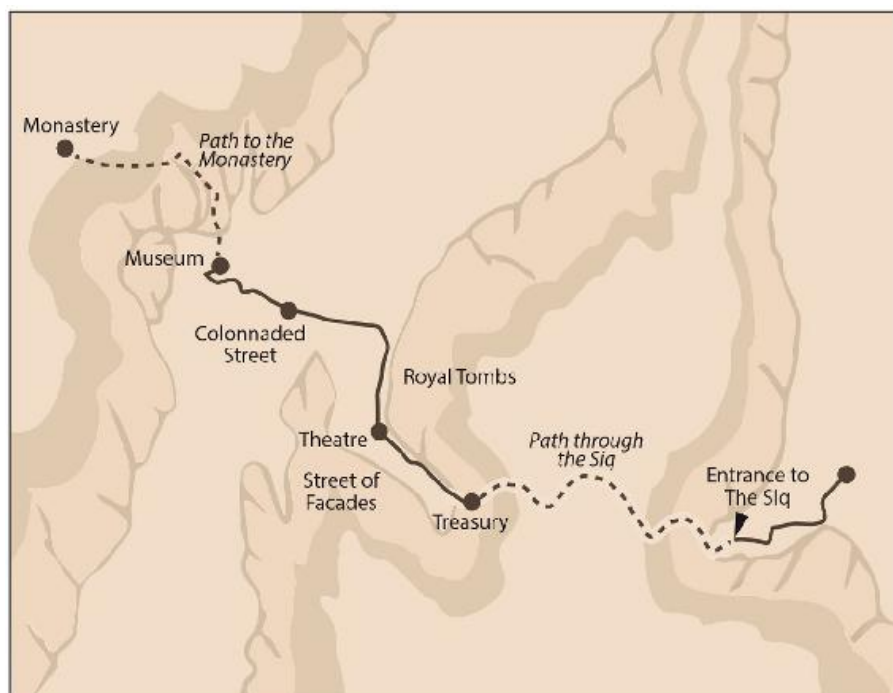


Figure 17.4. The path through the Siq and through the hills that one would take to Petra. The

buildings of various sorts run for over twenty miles down the Sik and beyond.



Figure 17.5. Petra temple



Figure 17.6. Monastery of Petra

After finding a spot to camp and settle, Alexander and Xanthia shared some food with nearby campers who were cooking over an open fire. Alexander paid them a little to cover the cost. The night passed quickly, so tired were the travelers. When they awoke the next

morning, the sun was well up in the sky. Taking a moment to survey the landscape, they climbed up to the top of the hill overlooking the passageway through which they had entered in the darkness of night. The view was nothing short of spectacular. Carved out of the solid rock was what appeared to be the ceremonial entrance to a temple, yet at its borders it blended back into the sheer cliffs. The columns were in the formal Corinthian style that Xanthia and Alexander were familiar with in Pella. But the statues suggested that this building was in fact a massive mausoleum that must have taken artisans and architects many months to construct. Though Xanthia and Alexander did not speak, it was an easy silence; the night before seemed to have broken any awkward tension between them.

Mausoleum

The word *mausoleum* comes from the name of a King named Mausolus, who had a famous tomb built for himself in Halicarnassus, near modern-day Bodrum in Turkey. Mausolus was the ruler of a Persian satrap near the western edge of the Persian Empire, long after the time when Cyrus the Persian had established his empire and in 538 BC freed the Jewish people who had been languishing in Babylonian exile for a generation. The Persian or Achaemenid Empire existed between 550 and 330 BC, and extended as far west as parts of Macedonia and as far east as India. Mausolus's tomb became more famous than the man, becoming one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and a model for later royal tombs, such as the so-called tomb of Alexander the Great, the sarcophagus of which can be seen in the Istanbul Museum.

Climbing back down, they found their way to the spice market. It was an assault on the senses. They had never seen such a variety of spices, and in such an array of colors. Here was mustard yellow, burnt orange, shades of black and brown and green, all their aromas wafting and mixing in the morning air. Cardamom, coriander, saffron, ginger, paprika, sumac, peppers, in addition to frankincense and myrrh—all vied for their attention. Xanthia could not begin to remember their

names as she queried and the merchants identified them from stall to stall.



Figure 17.7. Spices in a market

“I know what you’re thinking,” said Alexander with a grin. “How shall we get this all home? We will be buying a donkey to carry the load.”

“I’m ever so pleased to hear that. I hadn’t thought much about it until now. I could just see us hauling huge packs of spices all the way to Pella. Now we will look more like Mary and Joseph returning from Egypt!” Both Xanthia and Alexander had become followers of the Way when Hector had done so some years ago. The whole household had become followers, as was customary. And they had absorbed the vivid oral telling of the tales of Jesus, though neither one of them could read much Greek.

Hector and Xanthia decided to survey the marketplace separately. But there were so many stalls and vendors that even this initial foray would take half an hour. As Xanthia walked, she noticed telltale rodent droppings by a stall, and she thought to herself that this must be an ideal place for rodents and other small creatures looking for food, as they would easily be able to hide in the crevices of rocks.

As Xanthia was distracted by the haggling of one vendor with a determined customer, suddenly she saw an asp, presumably on the

hunt for rodents, lying across her path. Clutched by panic, she screamed. The snake struck, biting her in the ankle. The first person to notice was a vendor, who raced from behind his stall, his little paring knife in hand.

“Lie down at once!” he commanded Xanthia. “You are in great danger.”

She obeyed automatically, her heart racing, wondering where Alexander had gotten to. He must have wandered in the other direction, she thought as her ankle began to swell. The little merchant, nut brown from the desert sun, was already kneeling over her leg. “This will sting a bit. Here, clench this stick between your teeth.”

She did as he said, and then suddenly she felt two sharp cuts above her anklebone, and immediately after that the little man was sucking on the spot where she had been bitten, spitting out the poison as best he could. Xanthia couldn’t scream with a stick in her mouth, though it hurt enormously. She began to feel very woozy, about to pass out.

Alexander was now at her side, having recognized her scream. He looked down in horror, pale as a sheet of papyrus. “Will she live? What happened?”

The little man looked up and said, “She is not going anywhere for a while. It will take some time to heal, but she is likely to live. She may well fall asleep for a bit, and a fever is possible. But my brother is a physician, and he taught me what to do. We have quite a lot of snakes around here. I will bind up the wound, and you will need to carry her to wherever you are camping and let her rest.”

“Of course,” said Alexander, “of course.” But his mind was racing.

THE SECRETS OF BETHSAIDA



BETHSAIDA WAS BUSTLING with activity on this morning, the sixth morning after the fall of Jerusalem. By dawn's first light the fishermen had launched their boats. The embers on the morning hearth were still aglow as most of the women had begun their trek to the spring at the base of the hill across from the village. But Mattheos slept on. The wear of his journey had caught up with him.

Jacob guarded his guest's sleep from the children. He could hardly believe that one of the original Twelve, Mattheos, whose life reached back nearly seventy years, was right under his roof. Jacob's father, who had died some years ago, would have been thrilled at this.

The thought of his father's death brought up a familiar feeling of sadness, tinged with both guilt and frustration. Philip's death was shrouded in mystery. Some said he was martyred for his witness to Jesus, stoned to death. Others said he had fallen down a steep hill and broken his neck. As a son it was troubling to not be sure what happened in that remote part of Syria, nor to be able to recover the body and give his father a proper burial. The first duty of a son in honoring a parent was to assure a proper burial. He felt like a failure.

A baby's cry pulled him out of his melancholy. Esther, his eldest child, jumped up to answer the infant's cry. But the sound had already roused Mattheos, who had been sleeping in a small bedroom off the courtyard.



Sitting in the warmth of the morning sun a while later, Mattheos enjoyed a light breakfast of freshly made unleavened bread and dried fruit, washed down with a little watered-down wine. He was preparing himself to ask Jacob the big question—one he was half

afraid to ask for fear the answer would be no.

“Jacob, let me tell you what I am hoping to find,” Mattheos began, brushing some crumbs off his lap. “I’ve been burdened by the need—and a desire—to write down all I can about Jesus while I am still able. Rumor has it that somewhere in one of these villages there is a collection of Jesus stories, maybe sayings, or miracle stories, or parables . . . something. What do you know? Can you help me find something like that? I am especially interested in the sayings of Jesus. I already have a good deal in Mark’s good news story, which I have on a scroll.”

“Well,” Jacob began, and paused, making Mattheos’s heart flutter with suspense. “You have come to the right place. Almost, anyhow. Let me tell you the story of Peter’s assembly. When Peter finally came home—it was for a brief period, about ten years ago now—he turned the family house here in Bethsaida over to Andrew’s family. Peter then relocated to Capernaum, to his mother-in-law’s house, which—as you well know—Jesus made his home base while in this region.

“Worship was held in that Capernaum house, small as it was. We would all pack ourselves in there on Sunday evenings and have a blessed time. But it was not adequate, and there was no place to store anything. Besides, there was always friction with the Pharisees in Capernaum. And that has continued over the last decade.



Figure 18.1. The octagonal “house of Peter,” now under a modern Catholic church in

“On one occasion a scroll with some teachings of Jesus was left in the house while everyone was out, and someone came and took it. It was never seen again. So we learned the hard way to make multiple copies of our sacred texts and to store the originals somewhere safe. The copies are not perfect. I, for one, am no scribe, and I could not always decipher the original. But fortunately some of the originals still exist! And if you don’t mind a bit of a hike, I can take you to them now.”

Mattheos trembled with excitement. He could not wait to get his hands on these scrolls, whatever they held. With his stylus kit, ink, and papyrus, he was ready to begin copying at once. “Will I be able to take the documents with me to Capernaum and then bring them back? Or at least to your house, where I can copy them carefully in a safe place?”

“I suspect we can manage the latter, but we will have to ask old Jude, the shepherd who watches over our precious things. You see, we heard about how the Essenes were smart enough to hide their documents in caves overlooking the Salt Sea. And we have plenty of caves around here. So we picked a spot that could be overseen by someone, or at least checked on regularly. We have four jars with lids on them, and each one is full of scrolls. Surely you know the cliffs of Arbel?”

Mattheos’s heart sank. “Please do not tell me I need to climb up there to get these documents. Not that I wouldn’t attempt it! But these bones are old.”

“Not to worry. I’m still able! I will help.”

That afternoon, Jacob and Mattheos struck out on the main road back down through Capernaum. Jacob led the way, up into the hills that overlooked the sea of Galilee.



Figure 18.2. Caves in the Arbel cliffs, near the Sea of Galilee

“Our people have often hidden in these caves, including during the recent wars with Rome. Mostly they have hidden in caves on the other side of the cliff. We are headed to one that is on this side of the cliff, facing the sea—an unused one, never visited by strangers.”

Mattheos looked up the hill where Jacob was pointing, where the cliffs rose vertically from the ascending slope. He groaned. “This may call for singing a psalm of ascent!”

Jacob smiled and forged on. From time to time he offered Mattheos assistance over obstacles. Taking a rest and a drink of water from the skin Jacob carried, Mattheos said, “Tell me it’s one of the lower caves, please.”



Figure 18.3. View from an Arbel cliffs cave

“Yes . . . and no. It’s accessible from ground level. But it’s above some of the lowest ones. We wanted to put it beyond easy reach. Ah, can you see the sheep up there near the base of the cliff? Jude can’t be far off.”

Mattheos noticed a solitary tree clinging to the scree near the top of the cliff. He gestured towards it. “You know, Jacob, sometimes hanging on to our convictions and faith in Jesus is a bit like that tree. You have to have deep roots and be able to lean into a prevailing wind.”

Jacob smiled. Mattheos was a sage, seeking wisdom wherever it might be found, like a composer of proverbs.

Around a corner, near the base of the cliff, an elderly man appeared, poking his staff at a sheep that had strayed from the herd. His long white beard gave him an aura of antiquity.

“How old is that man?” asked Mattheos quietly.

“Let’s put it this way: Jude is originally from Nazareth, and he remembers Mary and Joseph *before* they got married. He’s the one you need to talk to about Nazareth.”

Mattheos, astounded, replied, “But that would make him at least eighty years old!”

“Yes. He’s an elder of elders, the oldest living follower of Jesus I know. But he’s as spry as I am, and he has a sharp mind.”

Jacob whistled and waved at the stooped figure as they approached him. "This is Mattheos," he called out. "One of the Twelve!"

Jude drew near. "Greetings!" he said, and looked closer at Mattheos. "You look like a tax collector I once knew in Capernaum, a Levite. Was that you?"

Mattheos responded with a grimace and said, "Yes, I am afraid so. But Jesus rescued me from all that."

"A good thing, too. There were Jews in Capernaum ready to stone you after that last big taxation, right before Jesus arrived there!" Jude snorted and raised his eyebrows. "So what brings you here?"

"I'm hoping to see the documents you have hidden in a cave up here. I am writing a story of Jesus, like Mark did, only more detailed and longer."

Jude nodded and pointed up the hill.

When they got to the face of the cliff, Jacob said, "You can leave the rest to me. The scrolls are in jars up there in that cave. But before I climb up there, a few questions. As I recall, they are all in Aramaic. One has the genealogies of Mary and Joseph. There are also other documents that Jude brought back from Nazareth once the war began. That was long after Joseph died and Mary had gone to Ephesus from Jerusalem. Which scrolls do you want first?"

"I'm most interested in those genealogies and any collections of sayings of Jesus," said Mattheos.

Jacob climbed with practiced skill up to the cave opening. Mattheos could tell that he had climbed up this particular rock face before. The entrance to the cave was barely visible behind the undergrowth at its entrance. After crawling in, Jacob turned to poke his head out of the cave mouth and wave. His view from there was inspiring, with the Sea of Galilee in the distance and green patches of cultivated soil in the foreground—mute witnesses to the labor and transforming magic of hand-carried water to the fields from a spring near Bethsaida.

"All is secure up here!" Jacob called down.

It took several minutes for Jacob to extract the requested rolls, each bound with leather thongs to keep them compact and prevent their outer edges from fraying. He brought them down with care, handing them to Mattheos to put in the pack he had brought to carry

them. Jude, asserting his role as caretaker, asked, “When will you bring them back? We want to keep them safe and not let them get lost.”

“I understand and agree. Give me a week to copy things, and we will make this pilgrimage back up the hill. I know you trust Jacob, and so I will give them to him to bring back to you. Is there a list of the contents of these jars somewhere?”

“Oh,” said Jacob, laughing. “I forgot to mention that we do have that list at my house. I will find it, and you can look it over and tell me what else you need.”

“One more thing,” said Mattheos, remembering a question he wanted to ask. “Do you know if there is a scroll with stories about Peter himself?”

No sooner had Mattheos asked than Jacob was climbing back up to the cave to retrieve one more scroll. As he climbed down he said, “This one was the last to leave Peter’s house. It was precious to the family. They are all dead or gone now, all of them except one distant cousin who still lives in Capernaum. The family became very unpopular with some of our kinsmen in the town, and most of them moved eventually.” Jacob returned to the ground and made motions to leave, but Mattheos wasn’t ready yet.

“Before we leave,” Mattheos asked Jude, “Please tell me about Mary and Joseph in Nazareth when they were young. How did their marriage actually come about?”

Jude reclined on a large rock, and looked out over his sheep. “Hmm.” He arranged himself before beginning his tale. “Mary was a mere child, barely thirteen, when she became engaged to Joseph. He was several years older. He came from a good, devout family. Joseph had struck a deal with Mary’s father. During their year of betrothal before the wedding, she was already his wife in all things except they did not live together, nor did they have relations.

“It was a total shock—a total shock—when Mary was found to be with child. Mary was a good girl, very careful about herself and respectful of her parents. Her explanation of how this had happened stretched the credulity of even the most devout who believe in miracles and angels and such. But she stuck to her story.

“Joseph was very shaken up by this. He would have to formally divorce her, since the marriage contract had already been signed and

settled some months before. He wanted to do this quietly, so as to cause as little scandal as possible. But Nazareth is a small town. Tongues were bound to wag, rumors were bound to spread. Many assumed that Mary had been taken advantage of, but was too ashamed to admit it. There was even a name bandied about, a Roman soldier named Panthera, who was suggested as the guilty party.¹

“You see, no one expected a miraculously conceived messiah. Our prophecies had not been read that way up to the time of Mary and Joseph, not even the famous prophecies in the early portions of Isaiah. But then something happened. Joseph had a dream in which he was told, ‘Don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child is of God.’ Well, this required Joseph to swallow a lot of pride—and honor. Was his wife’s firstborn child not to be *his* own child? On this the Torah offered silence. He had simply to swallow his pride and move forward in faith. And he did. But I can tell you the people in the town respected him less, not more, for doing so. It was like he was compromising the standards of holy marriage or righteousness. But he never complained, and he never would respond to those who tried to pry out of him what really happened to Mary.

“Fortunately, when Mary was very pregnant, she and Joseph got out of town for a while, going to their ancestral home of Bethlehem. And the baby was born there. When they came back to Nazareth, Joseph simply put his head down and went to work, building and making himself useful to the community. In time Mary had more children, and the circumstances around Jesus’ birth receded into the past. But then, when Jesus was baptized by John and began his ministry, the old stories were revived again, in many forms. Nazareth’s longtime residents had questions about Jesus, questions about his rising above his station in life. He was just an artisan’s son, after all. This really boiled over when he came and preached in the synagogue in Nazareth.

“You can imagine what those same people said when Jesus was crucified. Jesus was right—a prophet is not without honor, except in his own town, among his own kin, and even within his own family. You see, even his own brothers didn’t really believe him in those days. Yes, they knew he could do some remarkable things. But if you ask me, it was like the story of Joseph and his brothers in the Torah. There was sibling rivalry, jealousy, stupidity. His brothers didn’t even

see to Jesus' burial, a telltale sign of what they really thought. They were deeply ashamed of Jesus and how his life ended. He seemed to have abandoned his own family for some kind of ministry that ended in disaster. And as you know, our people have often thought that how a person dies reveals their true character. What is that saying from the Torah—"cursed be he who hangs on a tree." So people well and truly thought ill of Jesus after his shocking death. That is, of course, until Jesus appeared to Jacob, his brother, and many others. Well, that changed everything. Mary had always held faith in her son Jesus all along, even when she did not understand very well what he was doing and why."

Jude cleared his throat. "There is much more to say. But we can continue this conversation later."

Mattheos had listened with rapt attention, and stored Jude's story away in his mind. The sun was now high in the sky, and shone hot upon them. After final greetings and embraces, Jacob and Mattheos waved goodbye to Jude and headed home.

Now the real work would begin for Mattheos.

THE REMAINS OF THE WEEK



TITUS SAT STILL ASTRIDE HIS HORSE, surveying his conquest. He marveled at the resiliency and stubbornness of the Jewish people in the face of the mighty Roman army. Why had it taken so long for Roma to pacify this small land? Why so much resistance? Why did so many of its citizens not comply with the usual means of pacification—bribes, trade deals, alliances? Why such an all-or-nothing approach? Yes, there were some reasonable ones, like Josephus, but he was rare. Most ordinary Jews wanted nothing to do with war—but neither did they want anything to do with bowing and scraping to Roma. They simply would rather die than worship Roman gods, especially the emperor! How was it possible to believe in only one god, when there was so much good and evil in the world?

These were the thoughts running through Titus's mind as he surveyed the remains of the city of Jerusalem from atop the Mount of Olives. In the end, he simply could not comprehend such a fastidious, even fanatical, people for whom religion was the heart of the matter.

On this morning of the seventh day, the ruins of the city were no longer smoking, and the stench of rotting flesh that had clotted the air was beginning to subside. For the past few days Titus's troops had tackled the ugly task of burying unclaimed bodies in a mass grave in the Hinnom Valley, just south of the city. Even the Jews who had been crucified as grisly examples had been taken down and buried in the mass grave. Titus had watched from afar. As battle-hardened as he was, he had retched from the smell and sight. He had had enough war, engaged enough battles, smelled enough of his enemies' defeat, drunk enough victory wine. It was time to go home, to have his triumphal march into Rome, and to do something else. At heart, Titus was not a bloodthirsty or vindictive person, and he did not relish

torturing Rome's enemies. Like his father, the Emperor Vespasian, Titus felt he had the heart of a common man, that he understood the people. But then why couldn't he understand these Jews?

Rousing himself from these musings, with a "Tchk tchk" to his horse he began to descend the northern slope of the Mount of Olives. Down, down to the olive presses below, down to a little grove of olive trees—he'd heard it called the Garden of Gethsemane—where he dismounted. Earlier he had noticed a limestone slab in its peaceful setting, and now he would offer there a victory libation to the gods.

Titus had not noticed an old man, seated on a rock and screened off by the olive trees not far away. He had been observing Titus, and now he called out to the commander in that holy boldness the years had invested in him: "What good is it to make offerings to gods that are not really gods at all?"

Startled, Titus turned. "Not real? How do you think we won this victory, old man?"

"Because the one true G-d allowed it, who had warned by his prophets that because of the sins of his people, judgment would fall on their city and their temple. You were merely the agent of G-d's judgment, though you did not know it."

"And by the one true god, I take it you mean the Jewish god?"

"Of course. There is none other. And all other worship is vain." The old man's dark eyes were piercing.

Titus raised one eyebrow. "How then would you account for the rise of the Roman Empire?"

"It is foretold in our prophets, in Daniel. But you would not know this."

"I do know of it, actually. One of your own, a man named Josephus, told me about it."

At the name of Josephus, the old man spat on the ground, "A traitor! Curse him!"

"Or perhaps a wiser man than you, who can see which way the wind blows."

The old man was unmoved. "All empires, all kingdoms rise and fall, except G-d's. His kingdom is coming, but not by violence. It will be by the good news."

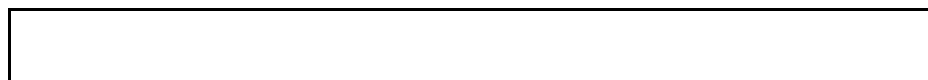




Figure 19.1. The Mount of Olives

“I have heard of this,” said Titus. “But only a little. Are you referring to the Nazarene who died on a cross near here. Where is his kingdom now?”

The old man smiled. “One day he will return to rule the world. Here’s an irony. You are praying right at the spot where he prayed on the night he was betrayed.”

Titus was incredulous at the man’s bold nonsense. “How can you believe in a god that suffers and dies? A god of weakness! This makes no sense.”

“Have you never learned that one gains strength through suffering and prevailing beyond it, through struggling and being vindicated after it, through having an unconquerable spirit, despite what may happen to the body? G-d raised Jesus from the dead after he suffered on the cross. He was vindicated. Your soldiers searched and could not find his body.

“His appearances after death are why his followers are still around, still growing in number. It is why we have hope, even here beside the ruins of Jerusalem. We have been knocked down, but not knocked out. We may be downcast for a while, but not in despair. G-d has not abandoned us.”

Titus snorted and replied, “What a strange god you seem to believe in, old man. A god who suffers for others, rather than others suffering

for him.”

“Think about it for a moment,” said the man. “Ask yourself—how are sins atoned for? By a sacrifice of course, the offering of a lamb, the pouring out of its lifeblood. But an animal sacrifice is of only limited value, limited efficacy. Its benefit lasts only until the next sin is committed. But suppose there could be a divine sacrifice, a sacrifice that atoned for all sins, once and for all. Suppose G-d’s son loved us so much that he decided to offer such a sacrifice? Wouldn’t a once-for-all sacrifice by a god be so much better than all these little sacrifices, again, and again, and again? Wouldn’t it be the ultimate sign of G-d’s love for us, that G-d knew we could never adequately atone for our sins, and so he provided the once-for-all-person, the once-for-all remedy? That is something well worth believing in. We don’t need priests, temples, or sacrifices any more. The atoning, the paying, has all been taken care of.”

“Well, not quite all,” replied Titus with a wry grin. “You still have to pay your taxes.”

The old man stood up and began to walk away. As he did he said, “Think about it. It will do you good.”



Figure 19.2. The Tomb of Absalom (first century AD) in the Kidron Valley

Titus watched the man limp off. A seed of doubt had been planted in his heart. Could the old man be right?

Getting back on his horse, Titus road down the valley toward Bethany, past gigantic tombs, including the recently constructed shrine called the tomb of Absalom.

“Death calls on us all,” murmured Titus. “No one can escape, and who knows for sure what happens beyond the grave. I trust that the spirits of my ancestors are alive in Hades, the Underworld, or even in Elysium. But it is a matter of faith.”



Figure 19.3. Other first-century tombs in the Kidron Valley

There were still many weeks of work for Titus before he could hand the province over to the new procurator. Conquering was one thing; ruling was quite another. Pacifying was one thing, keeping the peace another—even, it seemed, for Romans.

“Someday I may understand what all the bloodshed is really for,” sighed Titus. “Someday.”

Elysium

Elysium was a Greek conception of the afterlife that initially was considered a locale separate from Hades (see Homer), reserved for heroes and those related to some deity, such as rulers or emperors. Later it was thought to also include the righteous, and the Elysian fields were considered a place of pure bliss, unlike Hades, which was a shadowy realm of mere existence. Some suggested that Elysium was on some islands in the far western region of the known world.

PRAYERS AND PROVIDENCE



IT HAD BEEN A HOT AND SWEATY NIGHT for Xanthia, despite the cool desert air. Alexander had spent all night wiping her face with a cold cloth soaked in spring water. He had been praying as well, as he had never prayed before.

It was nearly dawn when Xanthia's fever broke. "Who stuck a hot iron in my ankle?" she groaned, her eyes still closed.

"Not me," said Alexander with relief. "I'm going to keep this cloth on the spot so the swelling will go down."

"I'm so thirsty," said Xanthia as she struggled to open her eyes. "I could drink a whole jar of water."

Alexander went down to the nearby spring, carrying a skin to retrieve the water. He felt almost faint with relief that Xanthia seemed to be coming around. But how soon would she be able to walk on that ankle? That was another question. Alexander was afraid that their money, most of which had already been devoted to buying spices, would soon run out.

The spring was some distance away, but Alexander got there as quick as he could. He slowed down as he bent down toward the sweet, fresh water. He was beginning to allow himself once more to think ahead to a day when he and Xanthia could be together. The funny thing about being a slave was that, since there were no arranged marriages for slaves, they were free to woo whomever they found suitable, usually someone in the same household. Once set free, they could marry and could even continue to work in the same household. Many slaves, in fact, preferred to continue in the same household even long after they were manumitted. It offered job security and the comfort of a familiar environment. Of course, all this depended on one's master—but Alexander had no doubts about Hector.

By the time Alexander returned to Xanthia, she was sitting up and peeling an orange. He paused to admire her face—intelligent in its dusky beauty—and her graceful figure. He loved everything about her—her voice, her mannerisms, her storytelling, her hard work. All this was undergirded by her deep faith in Jesus. He longed to have more of her faith, a faith that had gotten her through many hard times and crises.

But Alexander could not comprehend how Xanthia received the prophecies she occasionally shared in the worship. When asked, she always answered, “It comes from out of nowhere, from G-d alone. It’s not something I think up in advance. I simply hear it and repeat it. I am just the vessel. A woman can’t refuse to give birth when she is in labor, and I can’t resist the impulse to share the message.”

Xanthia looked up as Alexander approached. “I see you are recovering your appetite,” Alexander said.

“Yes, but I’m not ready to travel yet. Later today I want to try to walk a bit, when the swelling has gone down. Maybe I could even ride the donkey a bit on our way home. But right now I need that water!”

Another Side of Slavery

There is no question that slavery is an iniquitous institution, both in antiquity and more recently. Jews especially realized this and sought ways to ameliorate its effects, especially in their own communities, and this trend continued with Jewish Christians in their own communities.

But slavery in the Greco-Roman world was different from antebellum slavery in the old American South. It was not based on race or class. More than anything else, it had to do with who was and wasn’t a conquered people. For example, many Jews who dwelt in the Promised Land were shipped to elsewhere in the empire to work after AD 70. There is no doubt about it—slavery was not preferable to freedom, even ancient slavery. But suppose the choice was between freedom with destitution, or slavery? Many ancient persons chose the latter in a heartbeat, and this was not just another example of preferring a familiar hell to an unknown heaven. Sometimes life in servitude could be better than

just endurable or tolerable; it could actually have its good points. For one thing, if you had a good master, you could have long-term job security.

Slaves worked in all sorts of professions in antiquity. They were not just agricultural or domestic workers. In fact, a good deal of the Roman civil service was composed of slaves. By some estimates, 50 percent of the population of the empire's major cities were slaves. Slaves were businessmen, actors, teachers, artists, musicians, carpenters, stone masons, business managers, and so on. Slaves were not confined to menial tasks in the empire, though it is true they also did do the jobs others did not want to do, such as working in the mines—the most dangerous job.

So it's not altogether surprising that a slave would want an epitaph like "Slavery was never unkind to me." There were apparently enough benefits and opportunities to prevent much revolutionary fervor among slaves. Revolts, such as the Jewish revolt, were not led by slaves. Indeed, no ancient government, not even a Jewish one, sought to abolish slavery. No former slaves, even those who were literate and able writers, attacked the institution in writing after they obtained their freedom. They did write against the abuses of slaves and slavery, but that was all.



Figure 20.1. Mosaic depicting slaves serving at a banquet, from Dougga, Tunisia (third century)

While it may seem hard to fathom to us, one of the advantages to being a slave is that once you were manumitted you instantly became a Roman citizen, taking part of your master's name as your own. You went from being legal property to having the highest citizenship status in the empire. This was no small thing,

and the stories of manumission are numerous and varied. It happened with great regularity.

There is much more to be said about ancient slavery, and more to be said against it as well.^a This is not an attempt to justify or praise it. But it is important to see it in a more balanced light than is often the case today. Otherwise we will have a hard time understanding the frequent use of slavery metaphors to talk about positive roles in God's kingdom, the role of Christ when he came to earth (Phil 2:5-11), and even as a form of salvation, which rescued people from death and destitution.^b

^aSee Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 229-30.^b

^bA much fuller version of this sidebar can be found in my commentary *The Letters to Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). On the use of slavery language in a redemptive way, see D. B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

Alexander broke his admiring gaze and handed her the dripping skin of water, blushing. "Sorry. Here it is. It's just such a relief to see you getting better." In fact, he felt that life in general was going to improve soon. But for now, they were stuck in Petra for at least one more day. He couldn't really mind too much, though, as long as they were together. His heart warmed, and he offered a brief prayer of thanks to the Lord, finishing it with a silent request for guidance.

■ ■ ■

Hannibal had returned to Julius's office in the basilica in the town center of Pella. It would be an understatement to say that Julius was not happy with his news. Smashing his hand down on his little desk, he bellowed, "What? You mean to tell me that slave girl has vanished?"

"Not exactly vanished, my lord, just left town. And for some time. I hesitate to tell you, but I also spoke with Hector's lawyer Zeno this morning. He asked me to tell you that you would be hearing from him before long."

Julius groaned and turned away. He considered his options, knowing he had better step carefully. After all, he was the new judge in town and needed to be making friends, not enemies. The town was

mostly Greeks and Jews, not Romans, so he had few automatic allies. He wasn't sure right then what he would tell his superiors about the slave girl—but he knew he would think of something. He always did.

With Hannibal's hulk still overshadowing his desk, Julius said, "Thank you, Hannibal. You may go on home now."

"My lord."

It was going to be another tedious day in court, dealing with the annoying trials and travails of petty suits. How exactly, mused Julius, had he allowed himself to be persuaded to come and work in this godforsaken town of Pella?

OLD SCROLLS AND NEW SCROLLS



MATTHEOS WAS LIKE A CHILD with his favorite toy. He could hardly get over what was sitting in his lap. The sun bathed the courtyard in light, and the fishing nets were hung up to dry, their odor hanging in the still air. Mattheos had set himself up in the shade of a wall, his little pallet on his lap, with inkwell, stylus, and blank scroll to his right. But for the moment he simply gazed at the document in front of him.

Yes, the scrolls had deteriorated a bit over the past couple of decades, especially around the edges. But on the whole and for his purposes they were in good condition. Mattheos's attention was fixed on some carefully arranged words of Jesus in Aramaic, his sayings about blessing. Mattheos imagined that his Gospel would be mostly read by Jewish followers of Jesus. He already knew that instead of speaking of the "dominion of G-d" he would use "dominion of heaven," a circumlocution that would avoid upsetting his Jewish audience. He had collected all of Jesus' famous sayings about money, taxes, and tax collectors. This would help distinguish his account from Mark's. So too would other collections of Jesus' teachings, grouped by themes. He could tell from looking at the scroll in his hand that there was enough here for five or six large blocks of such teachings.





Figure 21.1. Fragments of an ancient scroll

He knew as well that comparisons would be made between Jesus and Moses, and the question would be asked whether Jesus was somehow greater than Moses. Or, for that matter, is he wiser than Solomon? Mattheos knew he would need to address these questions in his presentation of Jesus. For now, though, he could simply revel in reading large quantities of Jesus' teachings and think about how best to render them into Greek, so that everyone could hear and learn from them. He vowed he would not leave out Jesus' more radical sayings, such as "turn the other cheek," "love your enemies," "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter heaven," or "leave the dead to bury the dead." And he knew he must include Jesus' own predictions about the fall of the temple in Jerusalem. Perhaps this would intrigue Jewish listeners who were prone to dismiss Jesus as a failed prophet.

Mattheos worried about the loss of the poetry of Jesus' teachings. In translating them into Greek from Aramaic, they would lose their rhythm, their occasional rhyme, their assonance, their alliteration. What could be done about this?

As he pondered these things, Mattheos felt a little hand laid on his arm. He turned to see a miniature of Philip himself. The looks had

skipped a generation. This must indeed be little Philip, named for his grandfather. He had the same long nose, dark curly hair, swarthy complexion, and thin-lipped smile.

“What are you doing with those old scrolls?” asked the small voice.

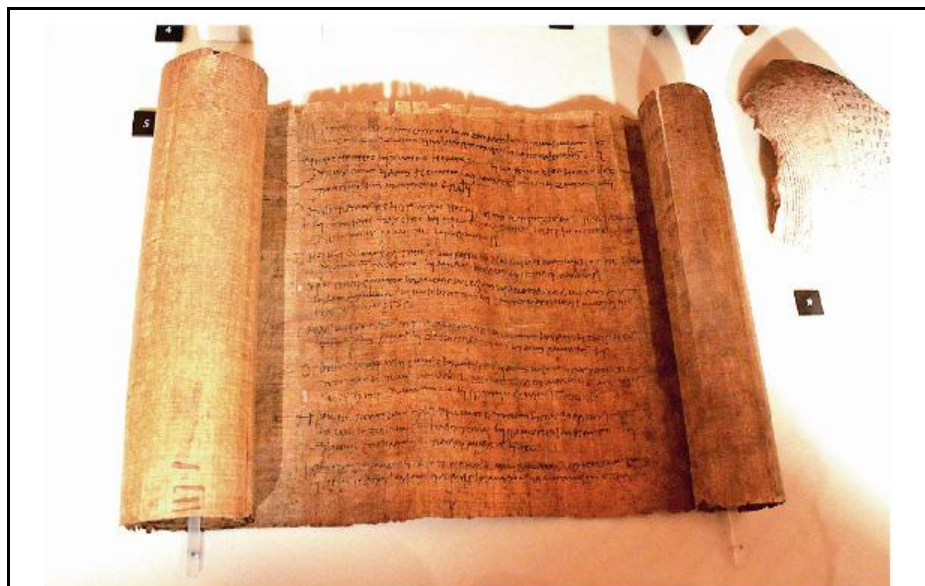


Figure 21.2. Egyptian papyrus scroll, AD 196-198

Mattheos smiled. “These are the teachings of Jesus, and they must be preserved at all costs. Let me read one of them to you.” He searched for a moment through the words. “Allow the little children to come to me and do not hinder them, for of such is the dominion of heaven.” The little face smiled up at Mattheos.

“I learned that one. My father taught it to me. Jesus is not just for older people. He is for me too.”

“You are right, and so is his teaching,” said Mattheos. “I am working to preserve Jesus’ teachings for people just like you and to put them into a nice story of Jesus’ whole life.” An idea came to him. “Perhaps you can help me some, by holding the scroll down at one end while I copy things onto another scroll?”

“Sure I can,” said little Philip, and eagerly put out a hand.

“Be careful,” Mattheos warned him, “or it will tear.”

Just then Philip’s nurse, Naomi, appeared. “There you are, you little rascal.”

“Look, I’m helping this man write about Jesus!” Philip gave her a winning smile.

Naomi smiled in response and said, “Well, later you can come back and check on rabbi Mattheos, but for now your father needs your help.”

Philip’s face fell, and he stuck his lower lip out.

“Your father says you must, so you must.”

Reluctantly, Philip slid off Mattheos’s leg and with a sad face put his little hand in Naomi’s. Mattheos called out, “Don’t worry, you can come back later.” Philip turned and smiled as he went back through the door leading into the main part of the house.

Clearly it was going to take Mattheos a long time, and a lot of work, to copy and then compose, based on these three documents. A lot of time indeed, perhaps months, many months. He would need to speak to Jacob when he returned from the lake. He did not want to overstay his welcome here in Bethsaida. But he had to admit, the view from here up high on the hill was incredible. If he weren’t inspired to write of Jesus’ life here, he would need to abandon hope of such a project.

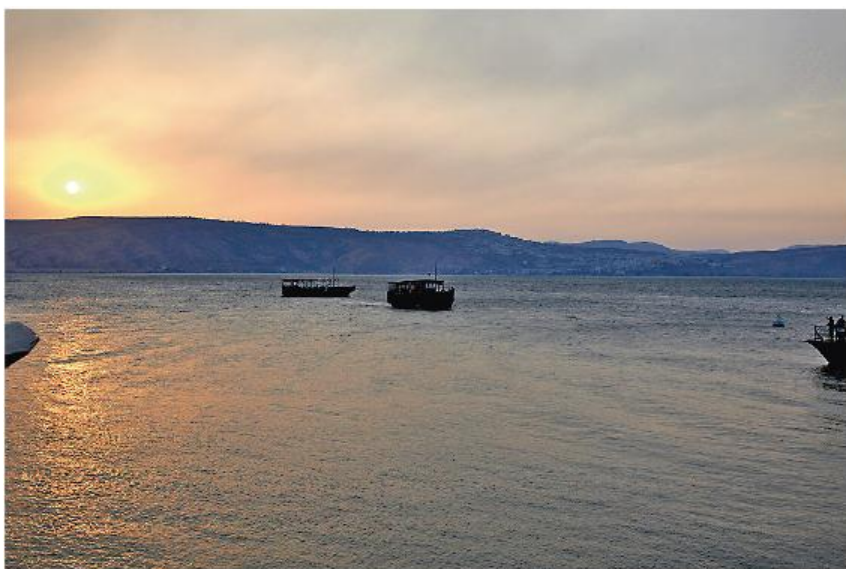


Figure 21.3. Boats on the Lake of Galilee

Just then, Mattheos’s eyes fell on a saying: “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a

household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” He reread it in disbelief. He knew in that moment it was meant for him. He was meant to find this, and meant to compose an account with just this quality—showing both the newness and the oldness of Jesus and his ministry, the newness he brought and the way he fulfilled the old, the old covenant, the old law, the old ways.

FAMILY REUNION



PELLA WAS PERCHED ATOP A HILL. To the casual observer, it seemed a city on the make, a city where one building after another was being erected. But the character of a city was not evident merely from its buildings. As Jesus had once said, “A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” But Miryam, Martha, and Joanna were not seeking the city itself—they sought residents of that city whose real citizenship and governing center was elsewhere, in heaven.

Their journey had dragged on. As Joanna, Miryam, and Martha trudged along the final stretch to Pella, each hill seemed to be followed by another. It was the seventh day after the fall of the temple in Jerusalem, and the three women were feeling the physical toll of their journey, as well as the emotional strain of their uncertainty about the future. There were Jesus followers already in Pella—this they knew. But would they know any of them? They expected to be received in hospitality, and yet they had agreed among themselves that they did not want to be an additional burden to anyone.

Still, it felt good to be coming to the end of the journey. Their feet cried out for relief from the road, and their shoulders were sore from carrying their baggage, meager as it was.

Each was lost in her own thoughts—even Martha, who was rarely silent. As they came to a fork in the road, they could hear voices on the plateau above, giving them new energy.





Figure 22.1. Ruins at Pella

Martha was the first to reach the top of the hill. Spotting the spring, she went there directly. She was parched. “Living water!” she cried.

All three women converged on the spring. It was busy with townspeople, each waiting their turn to fill their jars. The women sat and waited, happy for a moment’s rest.

Joanna, who had closed her eyes for a moment, suddenly stirred and opened them. She had heard a familiar voice from the bustle at the spring. Guided by long-dormant memory, she searched from face to face. Suddenly her gaze rested on an old woman, only a few feet away, whose back was partly turned. Joanna felt a shiver of joy run through her body.

“Miryam?” she said.

The woman turned and looked at Joanna. Her eyes widened, and for a moment the two women held each other’s gaze, unable to speak.

Then Miryam rushed to meet Joanna, and Joanna stood up, just in time for Miryam’s embrace. Quietly, Miryam spoke, “I haven’t seen you in nearly forty years, since you and your new husband went off with Saul of Tarsus. Forty years—and yet in some ways it seems like yesterday when we both saw the Risen One!”

Martha and the other Miryam watched with smiles and tearful eyes at this reunion. God had answered their prayers that they would

find someone they knew here who loved Jesus.

“Let me introduce you to two people you know a little and should remember—this is Miryam and Martha of Bethany. They’ve traveled all the way with me. We have come in trust and hope that the prophecy that this is where the Lord wanted us to come was true. And now we know it is! He has met us here, at this spring, in you!”

“Oh my—is that really you, Miryam and Martha? I haven’t seen either of you since Jesus last appeared to us in Jerusalem. After that I returned to Galilee—he had said he would go before us into Galilee. You must have stayed in Jerusalem for Pentecost?”

“Yes, we did. It was such an amazing time, when the Spirit fell on those of us gathered in the upper room. I will never forget those days! But I am so glad to see you again now.” Martha dabbed at her eyes.

So delighted were the women to have found each other that they had forgotten where they were. A Greek woman interrupted them to ask whether they could step aside to allow her access to the water.

“Sorry, sorry, these are friends I have not seen in many a year. You go ahead, and we will fill these last jars when you are done.”

“After we have had a good long drink, we can help you carry them back to your house,” offered Joanna.

As the women each took a jar, put it on their heads, and headed up the path to Miryam’s place, Miryam of Bethany quietly said to her sister, “You see, it is true, G-d works all things together for good for those who love him. Worrying doesn’t help or change a thing.”

“Amen to that,” said the other three women, almost in unison, and their laughter bubbled up like water from the spring.

NOTES

Chapter 2: Miryam of Pella

1. If you want to hear more of this story, see Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Jesus* (Nashville: Seedbed Press, 2014).

Chapter 3: The Daughters of Jerusalem

1. For the story of Lazarus and his probable identification as the Beloved Disciple who looked after the mother of Jesus, and their eventual move to Ephesus (or Ephesus, to use the Latin form), see Ben Witherington III, *What Have They Done with Jesus?* (New York: Harper, 2006).
2. This speech is a paraphrase of Josephus's own eyewitness account, found in *Jewish Wars* 6.271. It is adapted from the Perseus project of the University of Chicago, available on their website, <http://perseus.uchicago.edu/perseus-cgi/citequery3.pl?dbname=GreekTexts&getid=1&query=Joseph>. BJ 6.271.

Chapter 4: Sorrow and Woe

1. This is based on Josephus's account in *Jewish Wars* 6.281-282.
2. *Jewish Wars* 6.301-302.
3. The priest who was spared was Jesus of Thebuthi, who obtained protection from Titus in exchange for handing over some of the remaining temple treasures—two lampstands, tables, golden bowls, massive platters of solid gold, priestly vestments, various jewels, and even the veil of the temple, as well as other items used in worship. *Jewish Wars* 6.387-389.

Chapter 6: Levi's Flight

1. Jesus' brother's actual name was not James but Jacob. See Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington III, *The Brother of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 2009).
2. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9.
3. Eusebius says it did. Probably following Hegesippus, he tells us that in the fourth century the stele still stood "near the temple" (which, by the way, rules out the Talpiot tomb as a place where James might be buried). See Eusebius, *Church History* 2.23.
4. Josephus tells us that it took over a month. Even though the city fell in mid-August, the final actions were still going on late in September of AD 70.
5. See Lk 10.

Chapter 7: Respite in Jericho

1. Acts 17:4 tells us that “a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women” were converted in Thessalonike. Here and elsewhere there would have been a role for women like Joanna to play, bearing witness to higher-status and literate women.
2. Junia is the Latin form of the Hebrew name Joanna.
3. I am envisioning Andronicus and Joanna following up Paul and Silas’s work in various cities on their way to Rome. Possibly they had been incarcerated with Paul in Ephesus or Philippi, but it is clear enough that Paul would have needed a woman to go where men could not go when it came to witnessing in people’s homes in the Greco-Roman cities.

Chapter 8: Prophecy and Interpretation

1. Latin for “our sea,” which is what the Romans possessively called the Mediterranean.
2. Pax Romana technically means the “peace of Rome,” but what it really meant was the pacification of various places by means of military force. Josephus, however, is punning on the phrase and is talking about looking forward to getting away from the war zone and to some peace and quiet in Rome.
3. We do in fact know that Josephus interpreted the fourth beast as a reference to Rome’s empire. See the discussion of Josephus’s *Jewish Wars* and how to read them in Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

Chapter 11: Julius Reports Back

1. Any false religion not recognized by Rome or, for that matter, Athens.

Chapter 12: The Travels and Travails of Torah

1. On the Tyrian shekel see p. 49.

Chapter 13: The End of Levi

1. See Jn 1:44.

Chapter 18: The Secrets of Bethsaida

1. Something possibly suggested in later Jewish literature; see, e.g., *Tosefta Hullin* 2:24—“He told me of a word of heresy in the name of Jesus son of Pantiri”; *Qohelet Rabbah* 1:8(3)—“He told me a word in the name of Jesus son of

Pandera.”

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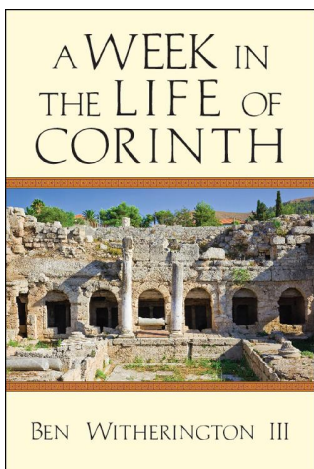
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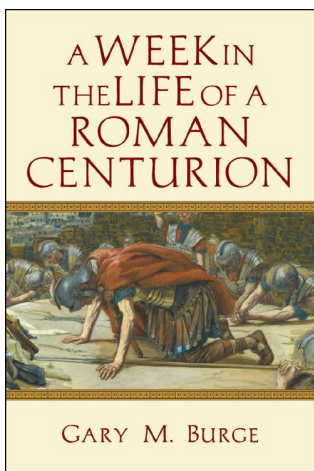
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ben Witherington III (PhD, University of Durham) is Jean R. Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary. A prominent evangelical scholar, he is also on the doctoral faculty at St. Andrews University in Scotland. Witherington has written over forty books, including *The Jesus Quest* and *The Paul Quest*, both of which were selected as top biblical studies works by *Christianity Today*. His other works include *The Indelible Image*, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, *The Gospel Code*, *A Week in the Life of Corinth* and commentaries on the entire New Testament. He also writes for many church and scholarly publications and is a frequent contributor to *Patheos* and *Beliefnet*. Witherington is an elected member of the prestigious *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, a society dedicated to New Testament studies. He is a John Wesley Fellow for Life, a research fellow at Cambridge University and a member of numerous professional organizations, including the Society of Biblical Literature, Society for the Study of the New Testament and the Institute for Biblical Research. He previously taught at institutions like Ashland Theological Seminary, Vanderbilt University, Duke Divinity School and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. An ordained pastor in the United Methodist Church and a popular lecturer, Witherington has presented seminars for churches, colleges and biblical meetings around the world. He has led numerous study tours through the lands of the Bible and is known for bringing

the text to life through incisive historical and cultural analysis. Along with many interviews on radio and television networks across the country, Witherington has been seen in programs such as *60 Minutes*, *20/20*, *Dateline* and the Peter Jennings ABC special *Jesus and Paul—The Word and the Witness*.

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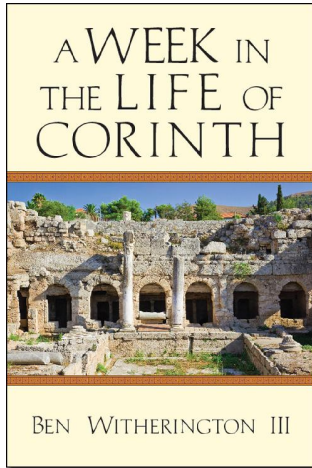
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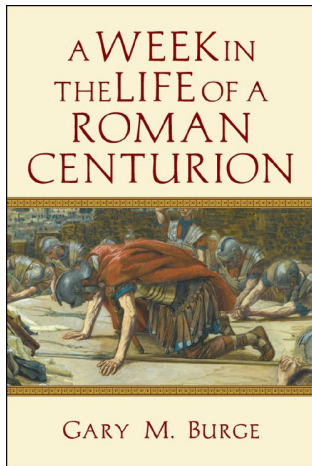
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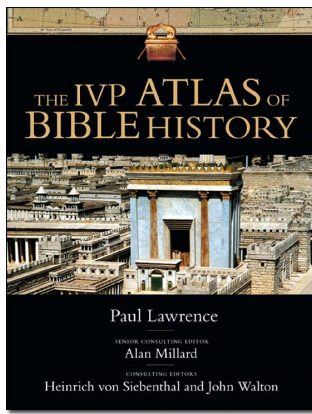
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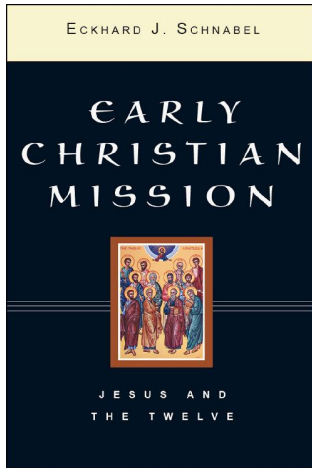
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Cover design: Cindy Kiple

Interior design: Beth McGill

Images: Destruction of Jerusalem, Cameraphoto Arte, Venice / Art Resource, NY

ISBN 978-0-8308-9284-6 (digital)

ISBN 978-0-8308-5173-7 (print)

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